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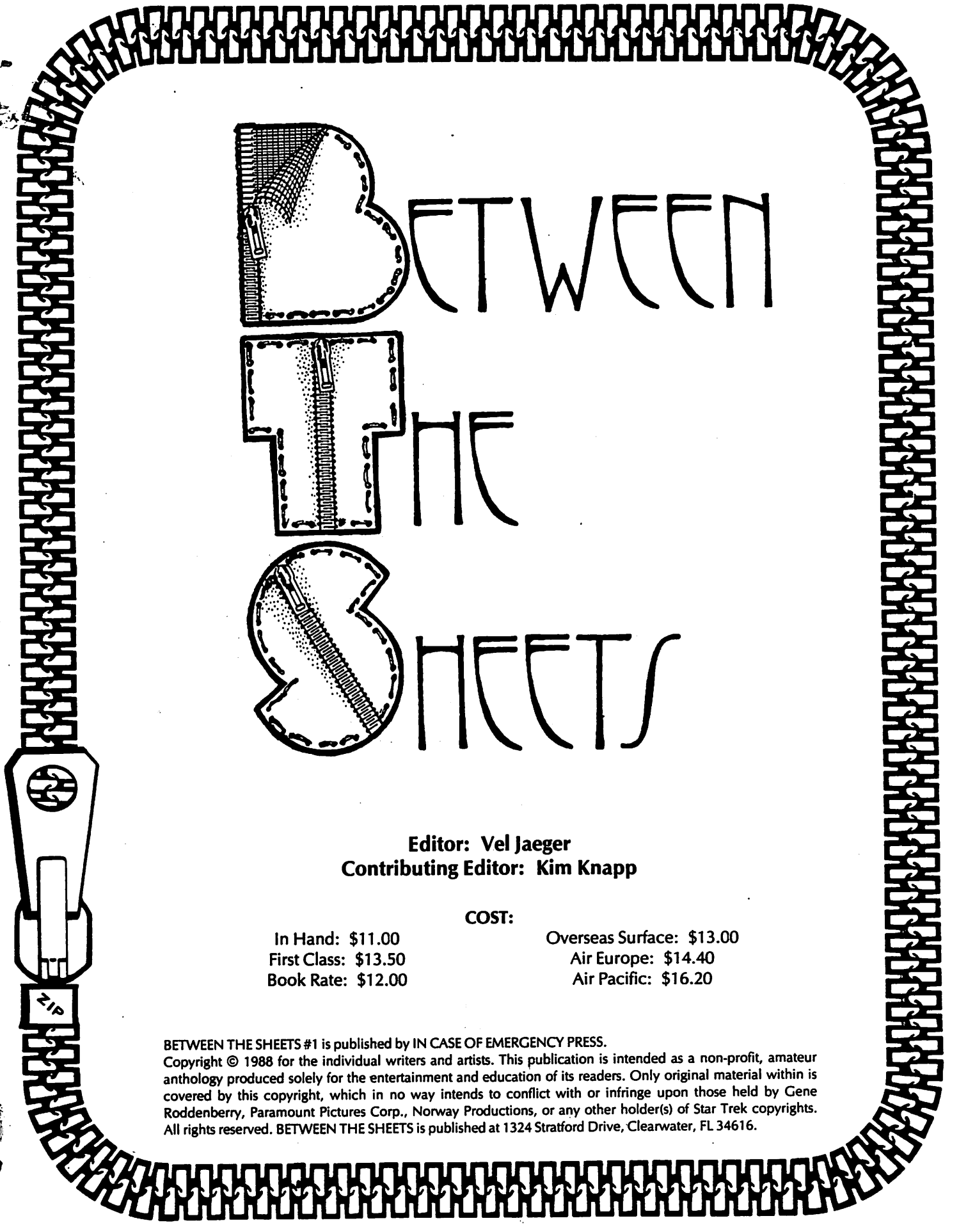

Editor: Vel Jaeger
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COST:

In Hand: $11.00	Overseas Surface: $13.00
First Class: $13.50	Air Europe: $14.40
Book Rate: $12.00	Air Pacific: $16.20

BETWEEN THE SHEETS #1 is published by IN CASE OF EMERGENCY PRESS.
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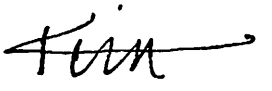
Inspiration -- Well, you know who!

Editorial Ramblings

What began as a frivolous collection of stories suitable for an adult Star Trek fan fiction reader has shifted a bit over the course of time to include more serious works as well as the original concept of socially unredeemable stories. It is hoped we've maintained our intended purpose of entertainment with this collection, and above all that the reader won't be bored. Each and every story won't be to everyone's liking, but we think we've provided enough variety to have a little something for everybody. We intended to boldly go where no network censor (or movie script, for that matter) has allowed any Trek character to go before. These stories are in answer to the burning question, "Okay, just what is going on behind those closed doors?"

No doubt many are assuming that the title, BETWEEN THE SHEETS, is simply a non-subtle statement of the contents. Au contraire! there is indeed a story behind the title. Long ago, in a California town far, far away, there was a fan club that began with high hopes. The monthly (and often more frequent) gatherings were such great fun that they were often written up for the club newsletter. Eventually there was so much fun that we couldn't begin to tell all the silliness that occured, and it was proposed that a small, intimate publication should be created to pass along the antics, bawdy jokes, and other nonsense -- things that were not "between the lines" of the regular newsletter, but "between the sheets" -- of paper. See? Now don't you feel silly? As time passed, the organization shifted goals, power changed hands, and the merry band gradually disintegrated. We never did put together that underground newsletter, but the name was too good to lie fallow. When ICOEPress decided to publish an old-fashioned, hetero-style adult zine, it was a foregone conclusion that the name should as last be put to good use. It is now handily abbreviated BTS, and when necessary to give a translation to mundane acquaintences, we've been using "Before the Storm," and saying it's a gothic romance collection. Most readers with good literary sense run away in terror at that point.

We are still up to our pointed ears in other publishing projects; it would be a waste of space to include a synopsis here, as progress changes monthly -- send a SASE to the address on the title page for information on any of our works in progress (Whistling in the Dark; A Hell of a Good Universe Next Door; Trek Encore 4; Tribute; The Good Doctor; TREKisM at Length 9: Tales from the Fourth Year; TREKisM at Length 10; an as-yet untitled collection of stories by Kyle Eric Stuart). And if fans are still speaking to us after BTS #1 hits the mailboxes, there most likely will be a second issue. Several writers are already working on sequels to their stories in this issue, and new writers have queried us about guidelines. So far, so good!



Vel Jaeger **Kim Knapp**

P.S. As of press date, Kim is in the process of moving into a new house, so Vel's address is the one given on the title page. The U.S. Snail is iffy enough without asking to route correspondence through a forward.

A Look at the Authors

DaraLyn Archer

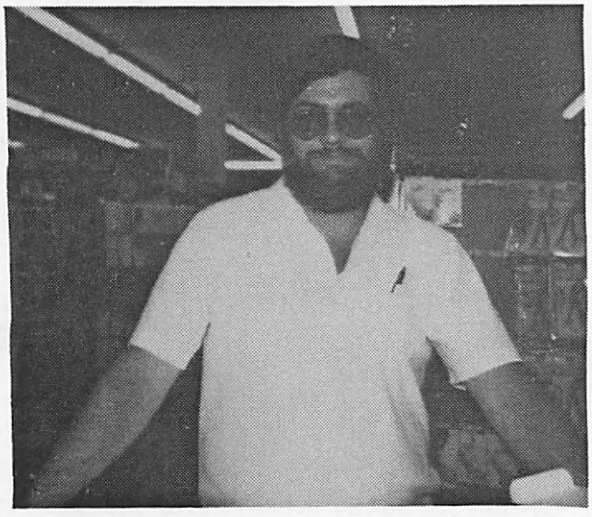
Janis E. Laine

Kimberley Junius

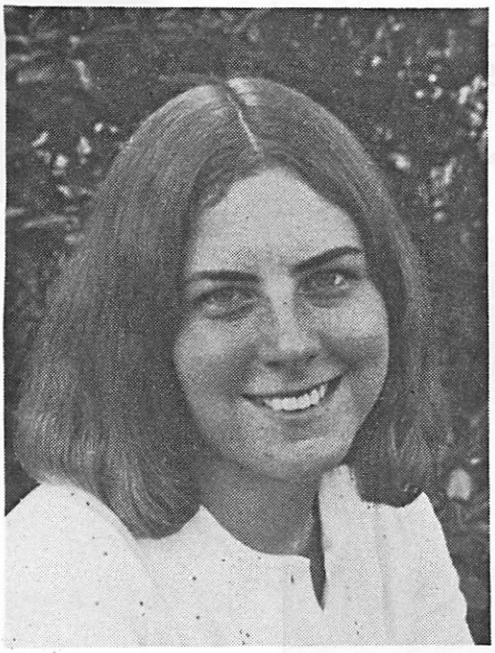
Cathi Tucker

Carolyn McTarrell

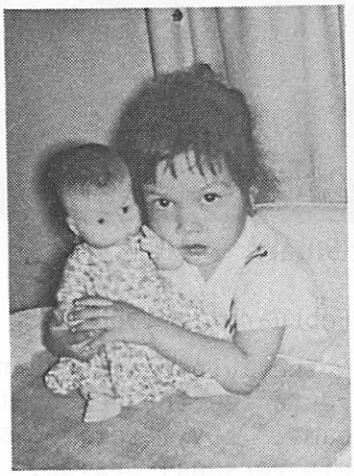
Karen Chobot Hunter



Larry D. Kirby III

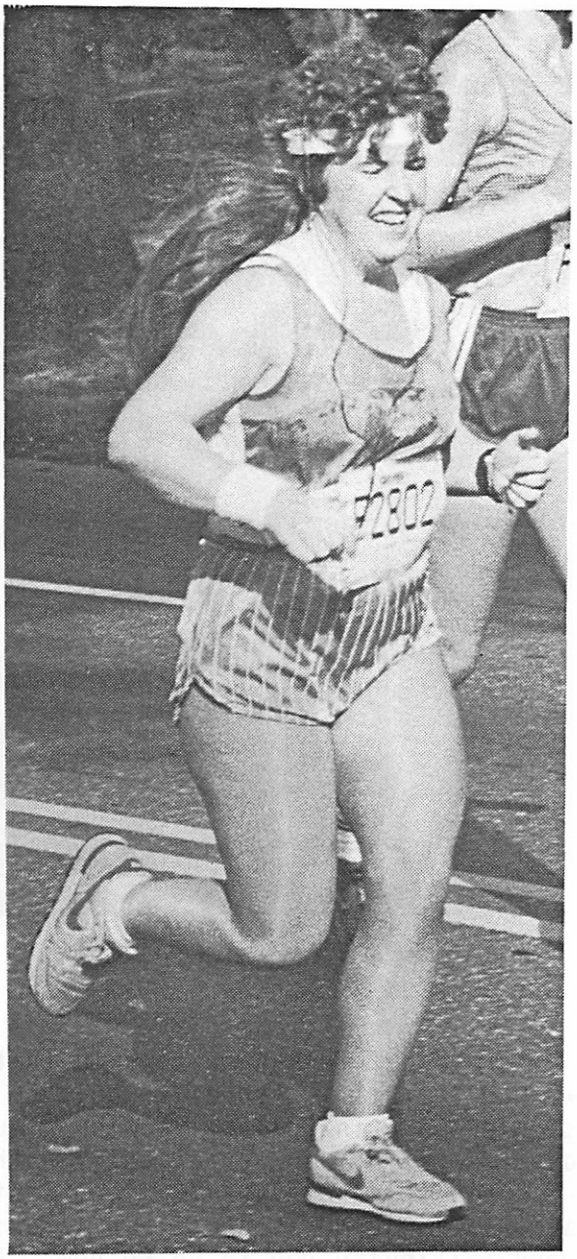


Jane Land



L.P. Santos

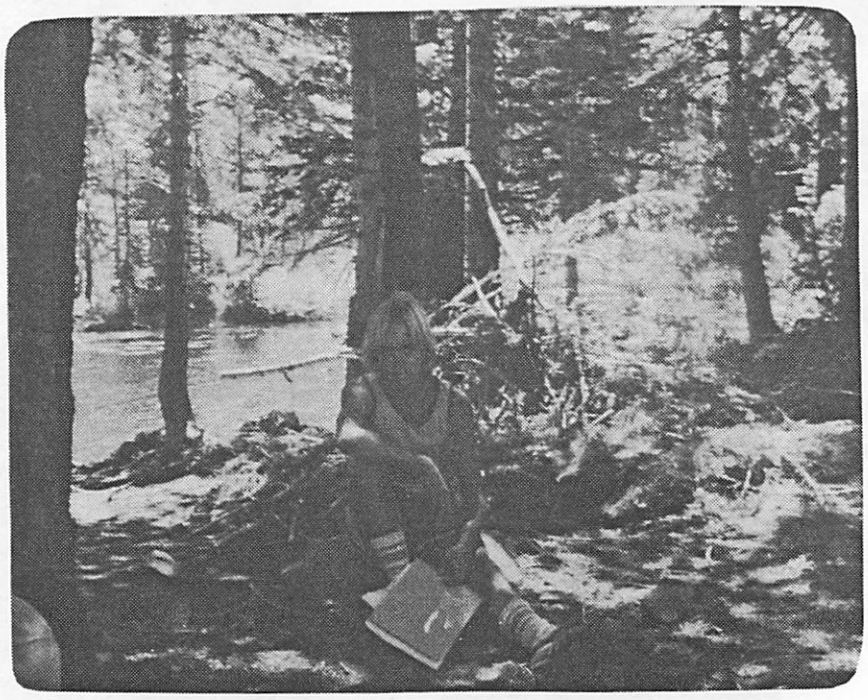
Ann Zewen



Linda Pugh Baker

Vel Jaeger Kim Knapp

In Memoriam



Kyle Eric Stuart

September 9, 1962 - February 3, 1988

A good friend once told me that to know the author all you need do is read their work. In this instance it would be very hard to see the person that Ky was by his single story in this collection, "Vulcan Dreams." By itself it shows only one aspect of his writing, and practically nothing of his personal traits.

Now, after only a few months since his death, I have been asked to introduce Ky, and all I can do is quote his words: To know the author all you need do is read their work. I invite you to do so now. Read his story, "Vulcan Dreams", and see a portion of Ky's personality. And please understand that this is only a fragment of his abilities. Understandably, this story cannot show you the core of his personality.

"Vulcan Dreams" does not tell you that he enjoyed listening to classical music, The Rolling Stones, jazz, and Elvis Costello. Nor does it demonstrate his love for art, a sandy beach, and walks in the forest. It doesn't show his fondness for life or his great patience towards those with different views and beliefs. In fact, "Vulcan Dreams" cannot be considered the source to learn about Ky.

"Vulcan Dreams" was the first story Ky ever submitted for publication. His writing came as a surprise to those of us who knew him. Although he was always ready to offer encouragement to writers and artists, he never once let on that he himself wrote. Quite honestly, Kim and Vel were the first to read his work.

To truly understand him, to know his thoughts and fears, you would have to read his entire collection, and hopefully, if you are not afraid to read the pain and rejections he felt in life, and if you are further encouraged by the joyful tales he weaves, then you will truly understand the man whom many called friend.

L.P. Santos
July 2, 1988

"He's still alive, as long as we remember him" -- Leonard H. McCoy, M.D.
CMO, USS Enterprise

RIGHT OF PASSAGE

by Kimberley Junius

The muscles rippled in Rachel's strong brown thighs as she pumped harder and harder. The light pink fabric of her playdress billowed in the rushing air. The determined-to-be pleasure of her white smile glowed in her dark face as she lifted it toward the sun. She closed her long-lashed eyes and imprinted forever in her mind the tranquil clouds against the ardent blue sky. She relaxed, pleasure easy now, and tipped her head back, trailing its long fuzzy pigtail. The young woman glided like a child on the ancient swing in the deserted park.

Jimmy watched her with chameleon eyes. His short, square fingers dug into the white bark of the tree he hid behind. The way her body moved, the way her face changed, the way her clothes blew in the wind stirred the hot blood in his fifteen year old body. He and Rachel had always played together. This stirring was new to him, though. He dealt with the unfamiliar feeling the only way he knew how.

A sudden jolt snapped Rachel from her reverie. She glared down at Jimmy, who reached out again to halt the swing, a malicious grin on his smooth, tanned face. She bailed out and rounded on him.

"You little runt!" she yelled. "I'll kick your ass for that!"

"You and what army!" Jimmy taunted. Rachel stomped in his direction and he took off across the baseball diamond. When she didn't follow, he shouted an obscenity. Enraged, she ran after him, screaming at him to take it back. He waited until she was an arm's length away, then streaked off toward Bauer's cornfield.

Rachel doggedly pursued him through the rows.

"Take it back, or I'll kill you," she threatened. Jimmy only laughed as he stayed successfully out of her reach.

His success was short-lived, however. He ran up the wrong row and barrelled into her. She grabbed him by the collar of his pea-green tunic and shook him.

"Take it back!" she growled. He struggled a moment, then gave up and smiled the smile that had melted hearts much harder than sixteen year old Rachel's. She relaxed her grip and he lunged away from her, ripping his tunic and sprawling them both in the black dirt. They wrestled in the shade of the cornstalks, panting and struggling until Rachel finally let Jimmy win. He grinned victoriously as he straddled her, pinning both her wrists. Rachel lay motionless beneath him, her soft, pinky brown lips parted. Jimmy's grin faded and his blood began to sing again as he stared down at her.

They quickly undressed and he slipped inside her, untaught yet unworried about what to do. Rachel showed him. He learned fast. And soon, much too soon he came down blazing, like the boy who dared to touch the sun.

★

The wind rustled the leaves of the cornstalks, changing the hot and cool patterns of shadow on their bodies. Rachel caressed Jimmy's darkening blond hair.

"First time, runt?" she queried in a dark-molasses voice he'd never noticed before. His changeable eyes narrowed.

"Do I feel like a runt?" he inquired softly, fitting his hands to the deep

curve of her waist and pulling her closer. Her hands tightened painfully in his hair as she pulled him forward and slid her tongue deeply into his mouth. The primeval rhythm overtook her again. Jimmy had no choice but to follow.

★

"Honestly, Jimmy, you're too old to get so dirty!" his mother complained when he tried to sneak past the kitchen that evening. She and his older brother Sam were having coffee at the worn maplewood table. The speculative look in Sam's hazel eyes made Jimmy blush to the roots of his sandy widows-peak. He mumbled an apology and trudged up the back stairs to his room where he shucked off his filthy clothes and fell exhausted into bed.

★

"No, Jimmy, I don't want to go in!" Rachel hissed, fighting against his attempt to pull her through the front door.

"They won't bite you," he whispered back, tugging harder. "It's just my mom and old Ms. Bauer and Sam."

"They'll know what we've been doing, Jimmy. Mothers and old ladies always know things just by looking at you," warned Rachel, whose mother had died when she was two.

"Mom's no telepath," he told her. "She can't even see past her nose since Dad died." He released Rachel's arm and angrily shoved his hands into his pockets.

Rachel approached him compassionately. "Oh, Jimmy ...." He shoved her through the front door.

She stumbled into the cozily lit living room, startling Jimmy's mother Rose, Sam, and Marilyn Bauer, Riverside's busybody. They looked at each other, then at Rachel.

"Hello, Ms. Kirk, Ms. Bauer. Hi, Sam." She waved fitfully, then put her hands behind her back, embarrassed.

"Hello." Rose eyed the long-legged girl uncertainly. "You're Marlow Handy's daughter, aren't you?" she asked, nervously smoothing her polished cotton skirt over her knees.

"Her name is Rachel, dear," Ms. Bauer whispered, patting Rose's hand.

"Thank you, Marilyn. How is your father, Rachel? I haven't seen him since the funeral." Rose's pale face tightened at the memory of her husband's recent death.

"He's fine, thank you, Ms. Kirk." Rachel stood there awkwardly, a brown goddess in a bright turquoise playdress. Her disheveled hair formed a coal black halo in the soft light.

"Rachel, come on!" Jimmy called from the dark doorway.

"Jimmy Kirk! Come in and be courteous this instant!" Ms. Bauer squawked, peering in the direction of his voice. He stepped into the room and grabbed Rachel by a slender wrist.

"I was just going to show Rachel my model starship," he mumbled, pulling her out of the room and up the stairs.

"Good to see you, Rachel!" Sam called.

"Isn't she growing up to be a beauty?" Ms. Bauer remarked. Her thoughtful frown added yet another crease to her seamed face. "I wonder what young Jimmy wants with her."

"Sexual instruction?" Sam offered, a lascivious grin on his handsome face.

"Sam, don't be silly," Rose chided her oldest son. "Jimmy's only a child." Sam held up his hands in a gesture of surrender. The trio resumed their conversation.

★

"I've seen your starship, Jimmy," Rachel said as he led her into his room.

"I had to tell them something," he said, locking the door. "You weren't much help. 'Hey, Ms. Kirk, Ms. Bauer'," he mimicked in a high-pitched voice.

"I never say 'Hey'," Rachel said crossly. "You're a rude little bastard."

He came up behind her. "My parents were married ten years before I was born." He unbraided her hair. "Besides," he whispered in her ear, "I do have something to show you." He buried his face in the soft, buttery-smelling mop, wrapped his arms around her and pulled her tightly to him. His hardness against her backside turned her into hot mush.

"They'll hear us," she protested faintly, clasping his crossed arms.

"Not if we're quiet," he promised, turning her around.

They were well into the game when a knock at the door sent them flying apart.

"Jimmy!" Sam's baritone sounded on the other side of the door. "Mother says for you to take Rachel home now. It's getting late." He paused then whispered loudly. "I won't tell her your door was locked." His laughter trailed down the hall and into the next room.

"Smartass," Jimmy muttered, getting into his pants.

Rachel slowly pulled on her dress. "Do you think he knows?" She sounded so frightened that he looked up from tying his shoes. "I don't want anyone to know, Jimmy. My father would --" She bit it off and gave her full attention to the white buttons on her dress.

"He'd what?"

"Nothing. I just don't want him to know, that's all."

"Maybe Sam knows," Jimmy said slowly. "But he won't tell. Mom's been spacy since Dad died, and nobody in this town is interested in anything that isn't growing in the fields. Nobody cares about what we're doing."

"My father would care, Jimmy." Rachel shakily rebraided her hair. "He ...."

"Jimmy!" Rose called from the bottom of the stairs.

"We're coming down now, Mother!" He turned to Rachel. "He what?"

She opened the door. "If I tell you, promise you won't tell anyone."

"Not a soul," Jimmy vowed.

The fragrant night breeze caressed them as they walked the five blocks to Rachel's house near the old Interstate. The stars danced in the blue-black lover's sky. But Rachel and Jimmy didn't talk about love.

"Okay, Rachel, tell me," he commanded. "Why are you so worried about your father finding out about us?"

Rachel didn't look at him as they trudged down the hill just before Main Street. Jimmy opened his mouth to ask again when Rachel darted in front of him.

"Remember that day in the cornfield?" she asked, walking backwards.

Jimmy rolled his eyes. "I'll never forget that day."

"I asked you if it was your first time?" she continued.

"It was," he replied softly, remembering.

"But it wasn't for me."

"So," Jimmy shrugged.

"Didn't you ever wonder who was my first?"

Exasperated, "Rachel, what difference does it make?"

They stopped. "They say you never forget your first lover." She stared dreamily at the stars. Her expression reminded him uneasily of the state his mother'd been in for the past two weeks.

He sighed, "What's that got to do with your father?"

She looked into his eyes, and in the light from the lovers' stars, he saw. Bile scrambled up his throat and his head swam before what was in her eyes about her father.

Jimmy bent over and grasped his knees. The gentle breeze blew into his ears as he desperately fought the nausea. After a few minutes his stomach settled down. He straightened and looked at Rachel Handy. She shifted out of focus. He closed his eyes.

"Did he make you?" Jimmy asked carefully.

Her "No" sounded far away. He opened his eyes.

"You must hate me know," she said flatly. She avidly studied the pattern she traced on the sidewalk with the toe of her black leather slipper.

He drew a hiccupy breath. "It doesn't matter."

"It does matter," she said desperately, turning away from him.

"Rachel," he grasped her arms and pulled her around to face him. "It's all right ...."

"Marlow said it was okay," she murmured, her eyes glued to the center of his chest. "He said it wasn't wrong. He's my father." A tear slipped down her cheek. "You're supposed to be able to trust your father." She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand.

"It doesn't matter," Jimmy repeated firmly.

Rachel met his eyes. "I told him I wouldn't do it anymore, just before you and I started ... he got real mad, Jimmy. He says he won't speak to me until I do what I'm supposed to." She began to sob convulsively. "Oh -- oh, God! I'm his daughter, not his wife!" she wailed. Jimmy nervously glanced around. The nearby houses were dark and silent.

He put an awkward arm around her shoulders and drew her farther down the street.

"Rachel, please don't cry," he said over sobs that sounded like nails screaming free of a wooden crate. He pulled his shirt tail out and reached up with it to dry her eyes. She began to giggle.

He frowned. "What's so funny?"

"You've got snot on your shirt," she said, and dissolved into laughter.

He examined his shirt under the street light and grimaced, making her laugh even harder.

"Go ahead, laugh! That's what I get for being nice," he said disgustedly, and walked off. She ran to catch up.

"I'm sorry, Jimmy, you just looked so funny with your belly button showing ...." She attempted to stifle another giggle without success. Jimmy grunted. She finally subsided to an occasional sniffling chuckle as she plodded alongside him.

"He said he'd kill me if I ever slept with anyone else," she said quietly. Jimmy stopped dead in his tracks and stared. "That's why I'm afraid of him finding out about us."

"Great Galaxies!" he hollered. "He can't <u>do</u> that! He wouldn't dare!"

"Yes, he would," Rachel said sadly.

"How can you be so sure?"

"I've known him all my life," she reminded him. "He's my father."

Jimmy was silent. After a while they started walking again.

"We should stop, then" he said resolutely.

She eyed him. "Do you want to?"

He shook his head. He honestly thought he'd go crazy if he couldn't see her, touch her, bury himself in her strong smooth body. He didn't know if what he felt was love, but ...."

"No, Rachel, I don't want to stop," he said softly, taking her hand.

Rachel smiled a woman-smile. "Neither do I."

"So what do we do?" They halted at the park. The third house down on the other side was hers. She faced him.

"We stay out of Marlow's sight," she said. "We can't let him see us together, <u>ever</u>!"

"Rachel, we've always played together," Jimmy protested. "Won't he suspect something if we stop?"

"The time is past for playing," Rachel said solemnly. "We all know that."

"Okay, that's what we'll do, then." He paused. "Can I kiss you here?" She glanced apprehensively toward the house. "He can't see us," Jimmy assured her, moving closer. She let him draw her, unable to resist. They kissed for a long time. He released her. She backed away, grinning, then turned and sped across the grass, her black braid flying. She leapt over the culvert, crossed the street and disappeared inside the green picket fence that surrounded her front yard. She didn't

see her father sitting in the shadows on the porch until she reached the front door. Jimmy, who walked back up the hill whistling between his teeth, never saw him at all.

FOOL'S PARADISE

by Larry D. Kirby III

"Bones! Hey, how 'bout it, Bones?"

Lenny McCoy looked up from the text he was studying and frowned at the speaker. "Ted, how many times have I asked you not to call me that?" Lenny glanced around the library, assuring himself that no one else was within earshot. "If my old man ever found out ...."

"Found out what?" Ted replied. The lanky redhead perched on the side of the table where Lenny had been studying and grinned. "Found out that his only son was the best crap shooter at the University of Georgia? Hell, tell him you're gonna be a doctor. Didn't you Southerners used to call your doctors 'Bones'?"

"Damyankee," Lenny retorted, but couldn't suppress a grin at his best friend and roommate. "Thirty thousand students here, and I get the Jerk from Jersey." He threw up his hands in mock disgust. "I'll never get any studying done now. What's sliding?"

"You know the Berg from Vulcan? The girl with the elf ears?"

"T'Lau?" Lenny responded. "Yeah, I've seen her around."

"T'Lau?" Ted said, his grin getting bigger. "On a first name basis? Is the Great Southern Gentleman going to unthaw the Berg?"

Lenny laughed. "Nobody could unthaw her. Vulcans have different customs than we do. She's told me about a few of them, but nothing about sex. She did tell me that their marriages are pre-arranged. What about her?"

"I heard she's leaving tonight, going back to Vulcan. Somebody said she flipped out."

"You're kidding," Lenny said in surprise. He studied his friend's face carefully, trying to determine if this was another one of his miserable practical jokes. "Vulcans don't flip out," he said. But he suddenly remembered that the last time he had seen her she was acting as though she was under some kind of stress.

"Scout's honor," Ted intoned. "I heard they called the Vulcan consulate in Richmond to come get her. They say she freaked out in Xeno-Bio and put her fist through a computer console."

Lenny thought furiously. T'Lau was not the type of person to do something like that. From what little he had heard of Vulcans, none of them were the type for public displays of any kind. But there did seem to be something wrong the last time he had seen her.

"Where is she now?" Lenny asked, rising to his feet.

"I heard she locked herself in her dorm room," Ted answered. Lenny started gathering up his books, but was stopped by a hand on his arm. "Listen, friend, let it alone. I know you like her." As Lenny looked up sharply, his friend smiled gently, "Hell, half the campus knows that. But she's different, man. She doesn't respond the way we do. She'll hurt you."

"Look," Lenny said, shaking off the arm and gathering up the rest of his books, "I'm not interested in her, not because she's female, anyway. She's a friend, that's all." He cradled the books under his arm and headed for the outside door. "If a friend of mine is in trouble, I like to see if I can help."

"You're not a very good liar, Lenny," Ted said softly. He watched as his friend hurried out of the library, heading for the off-worlder dorms.

★

It was a long walk from the library to the special dormitory where most of the exchange students from other worlds were housed, long enough to give the young Georgian time to think. Raised mostly in a small town, Lenny had never even seen an alien until his family moved to Atlanta when he was a young teenager. He was fascinated by them, and had found the Vulcan woman T'Lau the most interesting of all. She was cool and aloof, handling the initial advances by Terran men with polite disdain, but Lenny had managed what passed for friendship with her based on mutual curiosity.

They had conversed many times, each questioning the other about customs and respective planetary histories. Lenny had been amazed at a society based solely on logic, and questioned T'Lau endlessly about the philosophy of Surak. The Vulcan woman had been intrigued and slightly amused at Lenny's fierce loyalty to a geographic section of one of Earth's continents which he referred to reverently as 'The South.'

A chill November wind blew across the campus as Lenny walked the tree-lined path leading to the eighteenth century building which had been converted into a dormitory. He was more than a little nervous at the coming meeting with T'Lau. Although he considered the Vulcan a friend, there was something about the woman that had always made him slightly nervous, partly the hidden strength that the slender nineteen-year-old recognized.

He entered the dorm to a number of curious looks from some of the residents. He had been here many times, and most of the residents had seen him in the company of the Vulcan woman. As he entered the elevator, seemingly out of place in the antiquated building, he encountered another alien, a Tellarite he knew from previous confrontations.

"Well, the Vulcan-lover returns," the Tellarite snarled. His piggish face was always twisted in a perpetual snarl, as he was constantly insulting people.

"Hello, Granth," Lenny smiled warmly, an expression he knew the Tellarite detested. "How've you been?"

"Much better than you'll be if you tangle with that insane Vulcan female," Granth retorted. Lenny smiled again, waiting for the elevator ride to end. He bowed to the infuriated Tellarite and stepped out as the car reached its destination.

"By the way," Lenny said, still smiling as the door closed on Granth, "don't forget to slop your mother tonight." Lenny grinned as the enraged alien pounded in frustration against the rising walls of the elevator.

Lenny stood before the heavy oak door to T'Lau's room, suddenly having second thoughts. He was worried about the woman, but he was also more than a little nervous. He was not a physical man, and he knew the Vulcan could hurt him badly if she lost her temper.

But he found it difficult to believe that a mind as cooly logical as T'Lau's could snap; besides, at age thirty-two she was hardly immature. Something had happened, and he meant to find out what.

He ran a hand through his unruly auburn hair, noticing that the palms of his hands were damp with sweat. He wiped them off on his trousers and quietly knocked on the door.

"Who is there?" The voice was T'Lau's, and the strain in it was obvious.

"It's me, Lenny." He stood for a long moment, then finally heard steps moving toward the door.

The heavy door opened to reveal his friend. "Come in," the Vulcan woman said quietly. He entered the room, noticing that she closed the door too carefully behind her.

He was amazed at her appearance. Tall and slender, T'Lau had jet black hair,

usually done up in an intricate design on the top of her head. Now it hung below her shoulders in a mass of waves. Her normal meticulous dress was gone, and now she wore a white robe, almost like a bathrobe but with a hood lying in folds. Her finely chiseled features were grim with some hidden emotion, her eyes red as if from crying.

"Why have you come?" she asked. She stood facing him in the small, sparsely furnished room. Her stare made him uncomfortable.

"I heard you were having problems," Lenny told her nervously. "I wanted to see if I could help."

The Vulcan nodded. "I expected you. Sit down. Please?" She indicated one of two straight-backed wooden chairs in the room. Lenny sat down in one, expecting T'Lau to take the other but she remained standing.

"You were expecting me?" Lenny asked. "Why?"

"You are a compassionate man, Leonard McCoy." Her stare seemed to bore through him. "No doubt you have heard of my ... unusual behavior. You are here to help. It is a fine gesture, though useless. You really should become a physician."

"Everyone wants to pick my career for me," he said lightly, then turned more serious. "I heard you were going back to Vulcan."

"Yes," she replied stiffly. "I leave tomorrow."

"Why?" Lenny asked.

"Something has occurred that requires my return," she replied. Why was she evading his question? She looked nervous, almost like a caged animal.

"What?" he asked.

Suddenly she crossed to his chair and yanked him roughly to his feet. Her strength was amazing, but even more amazing was her anger.

"You have no right to pry into my personal life!" she almost screamed. "You will cease immediately or I will most assuredly break your neck!" Lenny looked into her eyes and saw madness there. He felt no fear now, only an overwhelming concern for his friend. She saw that in his eyes, and slowly released him. She backed away, wiping her hands convulsively on the folds of the robe.

"I apologize," she said in a formal tone. "I have dishonored myself and my family. I think it would be best if you were to leave now."

"No," Lenny replied, surprised at the calmness in his voice. "Not until I find out what's wrong." He braced himself for another outburst, but it didn't come. Instead the Vulcan woman made a visible effort to regain control of herself.

"It is something no Vulcan can explain," she told him.

"You mean it is something no Vulcan can explain to a Human," Lenny said. "Remember the conversations we used to have about the racism of Earth's past? You found it 'illogical.' Isn't this the same thing?"

"No!" she exclaimed, fighting for self control. She closed her eyes tightly with the effort, then opened them slowly. "It has to do with biology. Vulcan biology. It is a throwback to our violent past. It makes it dangerous for you to be here."

"Dangerous?" Lenny asked. "How? I know you could kill me if you wanted to, but you won't. You --"

"It is not your life that is in danger here," T'Lau said simply. Not like some alien, rather someone who desperately needed help she either could not or would not ask for.

"Stay away from me, Lenny," T'Lau said. It was the first time she had called him anything but Leonard. There was a softness in her voice, a softness he had never heard before.

Lenny was at heart a country boy, from a close and caring family. He knew that Vulcans did not like to be touched, but he felt if he could just go to her, hold her for a moment, he could make her feel better, help whatever was hurting her so badly. It was not logical, but Lenny had always been ruled by his emotions.

She backed away from him slowly, as if she were afraid of him. When her back

was against a wall she raised her hands as if to ward him away. Lenny moved closer, and her left hand touched the right side of his face.

A spark seemed to leap between the two of them, and suddenly Lenny felt a wave of intense heat wash over him. To his amazement and fear, he felt a presence enter his mind, a presence torn by pain and loss. And then his mind was thrilled with thoughts, thoughts that were not his own.

... Lenny, you don't know what you have done ... pain, tearing ... Sasxt, parting and never parted ... he is dead, Lenny, dead, our link is severed, we ... I can not control the blood-fever ... you must ....

Then the thoughts seemed to coalesce into a white hot heat, a small nova that invaded his mind and threatened to consume him. T'Lau grabbed him fiercely and crushed her body against his, finding his lips with her own. Startled, the attraction he had denied for the Vulcan woman now asserted itself, and he returned the kiss, hugging her to him.

He felt as if she were a part of him, her thoughts were his thoughts, but there was none of the cool, logical woman he had known for the past several months. The differences in their ages, their cultures, meant nothing as the two clung to each other in the small room.

Abruptly she pushed him back, and began to tear at his clothes. Lenny was shocked at the violence of her actions, amazed at the animal-like nature that had suddenly transformed her. He felt the material of his shirt rip as she pulled it off him. In his mind he could feel the overwhelming need in her, like a fire that could only be quenched by their joining.

T'Lau pushed him roughly back towards the small bed, forcing him to sit down abruptly as the bed caught the back of his knees. Then she was down between his knees, yanking at his boots and socks, ripping at the thick material of the trousers. Almost before he realized it, he was naked save for a thin pair of briefs.

Then she stepped back away from the bed and pulled at the ties of her robe. It fell to the floor and she stepped away from the garment, naked. She stood there silently for a moment, letting the young man drink in her beauty. Her figure was slender, small breasts now partially covered by her dark hair, nipples fully erect with desire, her hips full, her legs long and flawless.

Lenny started to rise, but she pushed him back on the bed, then fairly leaped on top of him. Again she mashed her lips to his, her tongue forcing its way deep into his mouth. Her hands literally ripped at his briefs, freeing his erection to her grasping hand.

He tried to talk, to tell her to slow down, but he couldn't form the words. It was as if she controlled his mind. Her hands were stimulating him in ways he did not understand; T'Lau seemed to know much of the Human nervous system.

Lenny's hands were on her shoulders, trying to push her away from him so he could breathe, but she was much too strong for him. Panic started to build, but then subsided, and he thought with a corner of his mind that she was suppressing his emotions. Her body was fully on him, her breasts mashed against his chest, and he could feel the moistness of her rubbing his upper thigh.

Suddenly she sat upright and straddled him. She grasped him tightly with her right hand and guided him between her thighs. Before he could react, she plunged down onto him, and he slid deeply into her.

At once she began a quick, measured motion on him, letting him slide almost all the way out before plunging down on him again. She took his hands and placed them on her breasts, encouraging him to squeeze them roughly. Her dark hair was moving around her head as she moved on him, now and then revealing one of her delicately upswept ears.

He could feel her muscles working at him furiously, feel the strength of her thighs as she grasped his hips with them. Her eyes were glazed, as if she were seeing someone else.

Lenny felt orgasm building in him, and began thrusting up at her, almost matching the violence of her own thrusts. T'Lau reacted by reaching down between them

and thrusting a stiffened finger into the area just below his scrotum. He cried out at the pain, and the orgasm subsided, but he maintained his erection.

T'Lau quickened her thrusts, slamming down on him with a force that was increasingly painful. He gritted his teeth, although he knew he couldn't cry out, and squeezed her breasts tightly as if to return some of the pain she was now causing him. But above the pain was a sensation of closeness that he had never known before. The times in the past that he had been with a woman were so different than what he was experiencing now. He felt a warmth of feeling for T'Lau that grew stronger with each passing moment, and he didn't care if the feelings were originating in his mind or hers.

Then his mind was flooded with heat, and the slender woman on top of him was crying out. His own orgasm hit, and he thrust up at her, feeling her muscular contractions as she bore down on him. They joined, two minds becoming one.

Lenny had his eyes tightly closed as the physical and emotional sensations surged through his body. As he slowly relaxed, he felt the gradual withdrawal of T'Lau's mind from his. For a moment the withdrawal was painful, and a keen sense of loss swept through him. Then a warm glow replaced that of loss, and he was happier than he had ever been. Lenny realied he was in love with the Vulcan woman, and opened his eyes to smile up at her.

Her face was unreadable. Although he knew he could speak now, the words caught in his throat. She pulled away from him as if he were diseased, standing up and wrapping the robe around herself. Lenny sat on the edge of the bed, a look of confusion on his face.

"What's wrong?" he asked. The woman had turned her back to him. "What's wrong? Are you all right?"

"Get dressed," she said quietly, not turning around. "I think you had better go."

"What?" he asked, confused. "What do you mean, go? After what just happened --"

"It should not have happened." The Vulcan turned, her face now composed. "I was not in control of myself. I lost my intended husband. His death severed the subliminal link between us. I could not control myself. I apologize if I have injured you."

"'Injured' me?!" Lenny exclaimed. He was on his feet now, getting dressed. "I don't understand. You just don't make love to a person without feeling anything!"

"You are reacting emotionally to a simple biological need," T'Lau replied. There was no trace of tension in her voice. "It was wrong of me to do what I did, but the consequences could not be avoided. You were here. Had it not been you, it would have been someone else."

"I don't believe this," Lenny said. He was dressed now, and it was evident T'Lau wanted him to leave. "How can you be so cold, so unemotional?" Anger surged through him as tears formed in his eyes. "Does that green blood of yours give you the right to treat people like --"

"Please control yourself," T'Lau said. "Irrationality will not help. You must forget what happened --"

"No," Lenny said, desperately trying to stifle a sob. "You ...." His voice trailed off. He walked toward her, but the Vulcan turned around and held up a hand.

"I am sorry, Lenny," she said softly. "I did not want to hurt you. I could not help what happened. But I can help you to forget."

"I'm not going to forget," Lenny said. He was crying openly now, and he hated himself for his weakness in front of her. "I'll never forget. You cold-hearted, green-blooded, pointy eared --"

As Lenny moved closer, T'Lau reached up and lightly touched the side of his face. The young Human froze, his face becoming slack. A blank look filled his eyes.

eyes.

"Forget what happened here," T'Lau whispered. "I did not want to cause you pain. Turn your compassion toward your own kind, for they need you desperately. Remember me as a friend, and think kindly of my people."

She pulled her hand away, and Lenny started. "What ...."

"It was kind of you to stop by to say farewell," T'Lau said. "I will remember my stay on Earth and the kindness you have shown."

"I'm sorry you have to leave," Lenny said, confusion plain on his face. He looked up at the Vulcan woman. "I was told --"

"Exaggerations," she replied.

Lenny could see that she wanted him to leave, probably had to finish packing. He bid her goodbye and left, still with a nagging feeling of confusion, confusion that was compounded when he suddenly noticed the torn state of his clothing.

"How did this happen?" he muttered to himself. Had he tangled with the Tellarite on the elevator? He hadn't thought so, but --

For some reason it didn't seem important. He found himself marveling again at the coolness of the Vulcan woman. She was damned attractive. If things had only been a little different.

"Oh, well," he said to himself, "probably the last time I'll ever see a Vulcan anyway." He wandered off down the corridor, figuring to bug the Tellarite one more time before calling it a night.

★

Dr. Leonard McCoy morosely stared down into his coffee. He didn't hear Kirk and Spock as they appeared beside him.

"Well, Bones, how are you this morning?" Kirk seemed unusually cheerful today. He must have gotten together with someone very female last night.

"Wonderful," McCoy replied sarcastically. "Can't you tell?"

"Perhaps the doctor has been working too hard," Spock commented. "He looks fatigued."

"What do you know about fatigue?" McCoy exploded at the Vulcan science officer. "What do you know about anything Human? You unemotional, green-blooded, long-eared ...." He stopped, a shocked look on his face. The entire room was quiet, with everyone staring at him.

"I'm sorry, Spock," he said, dropping his eyes to the tabletop. "That was inexcusable. Maybe I have been working too hard. I didn't sleep very well last night."

"Understandable, Doctor," Spock replied. "The Vian episode has put all of us under unusual strain. If you will excuse me." He walked away from the table toward the food processors.

"You sure you're all right?" Kirk asked, concern on his face. "I've heard you explode at Spock before, but that outburst bordered on racism. That's not like you, Bones."

"I know," McCoy said miserably. He pondered, a faraway look in his eyes. "Jim, you ever had a dream that you couldn't remember, but it left you with an overwhelming feeling of sadness?"

"I don't think so," Kirk replied. He studied his CMO. "I take it you have."

McCoy grimaced. "Yeah, and not for the first time."

He was quiet for a long time, trying to remember. Something sad, something that hurt. Something that involved Spock, or someone like Spock?

Impossible. There was no one like Spock.

"Must be overwork," he said, forcing himself to smile. Kirk seemed to relax.

McCoy glanced up as Spock returned to the table. For a moment, Spock's features seemed to shimmer and soften, his hair long and falling in waves over his shoulders. Long hair? Spock? McCoy shook his head, trying to dismiss the vision. Spock's face returned to normal as the aberration slowly faded.

Reality now restored, nevertheless McCoy could not shake a strange feeling of loss. "Must be time for shore leave," he muttered, "when Vulcans start lookin' good to me."

A Loaf of Peltrien, a Jug of Krebiah, & Thou Beside Me, Beneath the Keva Tree

by Karen Chobot Hunter

T'Siri was teaching Nela how to cook; not the genuine, and therefore rather restricted version of Vulcan cooking, but Amanda's mixture of Terran and Vulcan dishes developed over years of trying to feed one Vulcan husband and two half-Vulcan children. Using the limited foods available on the Enterprise for recreational cooking, the process was becoming something of an adventure into unknown realms.

"Uck!" exclaimed Nela at the results of one experiment. "The only solution to this one is recycling."

T'Siri tested it cautiously and agreed. "The purpose of this dish is a contrast of the salt and sweet flavors. I regret to say the contrast is not noticeable."

"I'll say. It's more like cookies soaked in sea water and left to a nice mold. Maybe we ought to give it to the bio lab for culture experimentation," she decided brightly. "Still, I think we have enough to feed Spock and Captain Kirk. The soup is good, and we can eat a lot of that, first."

"Spock will not notice in any case. He eats for nourishment alone," T'Siri told her. "All you need to do is keep him talking and thinking about another topic."

"All I need to do? What are you going to be doing -- seducing Captain Kirk?" Nela's eyes were twinkling as she scraped the last of the ruined food into the waste unit.

"I believe that is one word for the procedure," T'Siri said serenely, slicing Capellan oranges.

Nela stared. "Run that by again," she requested.

"Perhaps I should have chosen another word, or said that I am going to let Captain Kirk seduce me."

"You're not serious."

"Of course I am." T'Siri wiped her hands and set the plate of oranges on the table. She faced Nela, not as calmly as she would have liked. "Surely you have seen that he is attracted to me. There is something between us. I wish the opportunity to let that something grow."

Looking at her shrewdly, Nela asked, "Are you sure you know what you're doing? Vulcans don't do that sort of thing."

"I am fully aware of that," T'Siri replied drily, "and I must take the initiative or it won't happen at all. He is too aware of me as a Vulcan, and as Spock's sister."

"Then why?"

"He makes me feel different, somehow. More alive. My controls do not work well when he is around. I just want this."

Nela grinned. "Pure lust."

T'Siri raised a skeptical eyebrow, wondering just how she had managed to get into this conversation. "The attraction is not entirely physical."

"Sure." Nela turned back to the counter where she was brewing a pot of

krebiah. "We'd better finish this food, or that will be one physical need not satisfied, at least."

T'Siri returned to slicing vegetables for the ShiKahr Hot Pot, but her mind was still on what she had planned for the evening. Several days had passed since Captain Kirk had been released from Sickbay, but she had taken care to see him only on duty since then. There was always the possibility that he would not care to "Get to know her better," as he had suggested while he was still sick. If he had reconsidered, she could understand. But she had not been able to avoid Nela's request for the cooking lesson, and it did seem like a perfect opportunity. If he still wanted to have her, the seduction would proceed. If he did not, it would be easy to leave after dinner with nothing obvious having been declared.

"Do you want me to take Spock away somewhere?" Nela asked suddenly. T'Siri was startled and picked up Nela's hidden thought. Her roommate wanted Spock to herself for awhile. Interesting. T'Siri had always thought Nela one of the few who did not chase after her brother. Nela continued, "There's a book we've been reading together, and I've a couple of questions about it. I'll take him down to the library if you want to be rid of us."

"Thank you, Nela. If you can manage it, I will be grateful."
At that moment Kirk and Spock came into the room together. Nela, who had been about to put the round loaf of peltrien bread on the table, left it and went straight over to Spock. T'Siri looked at her thoughtfully for a moment as Kirk came across the room and peered over her shoulder.

"Looks good. What is it?" He took a slice of plac root and crunched it thoughtlessly right by her ear. T'Siri turned and gave him a stern look.

"ShiKahr Hot Pot. It will be ready in just a moment. I ... I must just set this burner working." Their eyes met, and she faltered a little. He had not reconsidered; he still desired her. "Sit down, please." With not so steady hands she placed the borrowed burner on the table to keep the Hot Pot bubbling.

Dinner went well. As T'Siri had told Nela, it was necessary only to keep Spock on a topic of interest to him, and he carried much of the weight of the conversation. Nela was trying hard to keep her end of the discussion going, and Kirk was trying to look as though he had nothing on his mind but food. Keeping her own mind fixed on her companions, T'Siri was amused and enjoyed the interplay. She began to see why suppers and parties were such a strong aspect of human social relations.

Shortly before the savoury was finished, Nela managed to get Spock on the topic of the book they were reading, and she contradicted him twice over one of the major points. T'Siri's eyes met Kirk's in mutual amusement: Spock did not take well to being contradicted. Her brother decided to have a look at the section of the book himself, and the two disappeared out the door.

Jim Kirk sipped the last of his krebiah, eyeing it against the light. It was clear, and a brilliant blue. "Not bad," he said, "considering it is non-alcoholic. Do I want to know what you make it from?"

"Probably not, Captain." T'Siri had learned painfully how squeamish humans were. "It does have a fruit/vegetable base, not too unlike a wine. Was the rest of the dinner to your satisfaction?"

"Delicious, thank you. When I eat Vulcan food, I only wish for a little more salt. I don't even miss meat." Kirk turned to her and laid his hand over hers, where it rested on the table. "I'm glad they left. We haven't had a chance to talk. You've been avoiding me."

"Avoiding you? No. There has just been no appropriate opportunity." The touch of his hand was proving distracting, but T'Siri did not pull away. She was determined to go through with this.

"Have you thought over what I said while I was in Sickbay? I've thought of it a lot."

T'Siri rose and carried the last of the dishes over to the recycling unit. "Yes, I've thought of it also. I wonder that you are still of the same mind."

He was right behind her and put his hands on her shoulders. "You are very beautiful. Did anyone ever tell you that on Vulcan?"

"Of course not. On Vulcan it is not a relevant concept." She knew she wasn't really beautiful, in any case. Merely exotic and Vulcan, desirable to one who had already accepted Vulcans in his world. But it was very important for Kirk to think of her as beautiful, and she found it pleasant to be told so.

"Let's get out of here," Kirk suggested. "Come up to my cabin, and we can talk. I don't like these impersonal rec rooms." They headed down the corridor to the turbolift. "What sort of music do you like, T'Siri? Are you familiar with any Terran classics?"

"Indeed. My mother has a large library of Terran music. Do you have any tapes of 21st century Reconstructionists?"

Kirk gave her an odd glance. They rode up in the turbolift not speaking, and T'Siri wondered what she had or had not said. As they reached his door, Kirk said at last, "I'm not inviting you to listen to music, T'Siri."

"I am aware of that. That is not why I am coming with you."

He laughed. "I forget. Vulcans don't flirt either. It's hard to remember that you take everything so damn literally." He released the door lock, and it slid back to show them his darkened office. Crossing to his desk, he poured up the drinks he had waiting there. "This is not something you can make in a starship kitchen," he grinned as he handed it to her.

She sipped it cautiously, then appreciatively. "Very good. I trust you are remembering that alcohol does not affect me."

"That's your misfortune, T'Siri. I like the effect." He took the glass back from her and set it on the desk. "And I'm glad you're here."

"As am I."

He leaned forward and touched her lips with his. T'Siri had never been kissed before and pulled away. Kirk looked startled, then gave a short laugh. "I keep running into the same thing. Vulcans don't kiss, do they?"

"I have never seen one do so. I would not make it a general rule, however." T'Siri laid her hand on Kirk's arm, fighting the awareness of him that the gesture brought. "I am sorry. Will you show me again?"

Very gently Kirk took her chin and pulled her closely to him. It was a very nice kiss, and T'Siri felt nothing from it; but her chin where his hand touched was burning. It isn't going to work, she thought. Here we are, and I don't know what to do. Frustrated, she pulled against him and their bodies touched. Kirk responded like a magnet, pulling her closer and holding her tightly in his arms. The kiss became stronger, more insistent.

T'Siri fought with her controls, trying to maintain them against the onslaught of his emotions. When he was with her, her barriers never did work properly, and she could barely pull them together to keep him out of her mind. It was almost torture.

Kirk did not seem to be aware of her mental struggle. In fact, her body seemed to know what to do. T'Siri's arms held Kirk in return, and one hand was caught in his hair, holding his head down to hers. Gently she began to release herself and met his eye. Kirk pulled back.

"You seem to be getting the idea," he grinned. "Want to try that again?"

T'Siri fought with herself and lost. "No. I cannot."

That rocked Kirk back on his heels. "You can't? What are you talking about?"

T'Siri put some distance between Kirk and herself. The emotional barrage was lessened, and she could think again. "It's you. When you touch me, I can not think for myself. All I can think of is you."

"You've got it. You're supposed to do that." Kirk was obviously puzzled. "No controls, that's the idea."

"I cannot do it, Jim. I just can't." T'Siri had a lump in her throat, and the pained look in his eyes was not making it easier to bear. "I am so sorry. I

want to, I tried to." Stumbling with blurred eyesight, T'Siri ran into the door. "Please, may I go?"

Kirk released the catch stiffly. "I'm not keeping you."

"Good night." T'Siri drew herself together as the door opened.

"T'Siri?" She turned to look at him. "It's all right. I understand," he said gently. "Don't worry about it."

Unable to answer that, she hurried out the door, fighting down a surge of sadness and loneliness for having been unable to do what she had tried so hard to accomplish.

On the deck below, Nela and Spock were in the library, still in discussion over the book they had argued over during dinner. Twice she had managed to bring Spock to agree with her, so that she did not mind having three times lost the train of his thought while he patiently tried to explain what to him was an elementary concept. In the back of her mind was a little question and a lot of curiosity about what was happening with T'Siri and Kirk.

Without warning, she was struck by a feeling of intense loneliness, a sadness that seemed to come from outside of herself. She looked to Spock and saw a questioning look on his face, as if listening to something she could not hear.

"What is T'Siri doing?" Spock demanded of her as the feeling dissipated.

"Trying ... " She stopped, not knowing how to say this. "She's with Captain Kirk," seemed the only answer.

"Return to your cabin," he said. "T'Siri may need you." Spock disappeared out the door.

Nela hurried back to her room. The main area was dark and silent. Stepping over to the divider, she peered into the sleeping quarters. "T'Siri, are you here?"

"Yes." The Vulcan woman was sitting quite still on the edge of the bed, staring into the dark.

"Are you all right?"

"Do not be concerned." T'Siri's voice almost broke, and Nela thought surely she was about to cry.

"Oh, T'Siri, didn't he want to?" She sat beside her friend on the bunk.

"He wanted to, Nela, and we tried. But I just couldn't do it. He was too strong for me to hold out."

"Why are you trying to hold him out?" Nela asked, puzzled. "You can't accept him physically and not mentally, can you?"

T'Siri's face in the light from the other room seemed equally puzzled. "Of course I have to block him. He is too strong. It is like trying to push back the ocean to save myself."

"You have to swim in the ocean, T'Siri. It is too big to hold off." Nela took one of T'Siri's hands. "Can you bear it when I touch you?" T'Siri nodded. "Are you blocking me?"

"No." T'Siri said slowly. I have not had to block you for a long time. I have forgotten that you and I are different." She looked at Nela, comprehension dawning. "I am doing something different with you, am I not? However did you know that?"

"I can tell things like that sometimes," Nela shrugged. "It is one of the things I learned when I was on Vulcan."

"So, what am I doing? Here, touch me again and let me see." T'Siri reached for Nela, and they joined hands again. Her thoughts inward, T'Siri studied her own system and what it was doing, while Nela watched with her, a little startled at being so directly admitted to T'Siri's mind. "I am accepting you, I can tell that, but it is draining off, not building up. I am not blocking, but I am not really aware of what you are thinking unless I try. I wonder. Do you think this can be the answer to how to keep my thoughts and emotions from broadcasting when I have no wish to do so?"

"Can we worry about that some other time? I'd like to know if you can go back to Jim Kirk and try again.'

T'Siri pulled her hand back from Nela. "I do not think I can."

"Of course you can," Nela said impatiently. "If you can channel off what I am thinking, you can do the same with a man. You just have to decide what to accept, what not to. If you really want to be aroused, you will let it happen." T'Siri did not reply. "That's it, then, isn't it? You are afraid to be with him, afraid to let him be close to you. Why? I thought you wanted this."

"Do I really have to explain it to you, Nela? I thought you, and he, would be more understanding of what it means to be Vulcan. Loving another in this way, casually, is not permitted. My training is against me."

Nela made a rude noise and stood up. "That makes a handy little excuse. However, since I have noticed that Vulcans do have babies as much as the rest of us, and that generally there are no taboos against acts that no one would think of committing, it seems to me that a lot more of your people must enjoy love than you seem to think. Your father married a human woman, after all. No one crucified him for it; he's still a very influential man on Vulcan."

T'Siri said slowly, "You think I am doing this on purpose, that I could manage if I wanted to?"

Nela nodded. "Take my hand again and see if you can tell what I am thinking, then practice letting it drain off." They stood for a moment while Nela thought of how unfair it was to Kirk for T'Siri to expect him to be Vulcan for her. T'Siri did not blush, but the tips of her ears turned slightly green. Then, as she practiced channeling off Nela's thoughts, the green disappeared.

"I shall try again," T'Siri said suddenly. She headed for the door, then turned. "Thank you, Nela."

Nela shrugged. "You owe me one," she said softly as the door slid shut.

Spock reached the captain's quarters as quickly as he could and sounded the door signal. Kirk answered it almost instantly.

"What the hell do you want?" Kirk asked irritably when he saw who it was.

"Is T'Siri here?"

"No. She just left."

"I heard her call out."

"You heard her? That's wonderful. I suppose everyone else on the ship 'heard' her as well." The captain turned back into the room, his mouth working.

"They were aware of something; I doubt if they realized what it was." Still not reassured about his sister, Spock was starting to be concerned about his captain as well. "May I ask what happened?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing." Kirk went over to his desk and poured out another drink. Spock noticed there were two glasses on the desk, music playing over the speaker.

It wasn't for lack of trying, he thought, then said aloud, "T'Siri would not call out like that for no reason.

"I touched her, Spock. That's all! I had my hands on her shoulders and she was taking it like I was abusing her. Why can't she let me touch her? She knows I'd never hurt her." Kirk turned back to Spock, his defenses down. This had hurt, and he couldn't hide it.

"Vulcan women are much more sensitive telepaths than males are," Spock began. "Also, T'Siri has another problem. She is an empath, able to send and receive emotions. You are a very strong emotional sender. It is possible that she has not yet learned to balance the two factors."

"You can do it."

"I am not an empath. And you are not trying to seduce me." Spock decided it was time to ease the tension a little.

Kirk grinned. "Trying. That's the word. Looks like that's all it will ever be." He looked to his friend with a wry twist to his mouth. "You don't mind that

I tried?"

Spock shook his head. "T'Siri is an adult. She came aboard the Enterprise to learn more about her Human heritage. Since this is one of those things that she must learn, I would rather it be you than another."

"Thank you, Spock."

The door signal sounded again. Setting down his drink, Kirk activated the door, and T'Siri burst into the room.

"I've got it figured out, Jim! It was just a matter of channeling and accepting. I was fighting it too much." T'Siri's face was bright, almost smiling. As she did not see Spock to her left, he cleared his throat.

"In that case, I shall say good night." He nodded and left the room, not scolding his sister for the startled look which greeted him.

As he turned to go to his own cabin, Spock saw a figure in the accessway between the cabins. "Who is there?" he asked.

Nela came out of the shadows. "Is T'Siri all right?" she demanded.

"That is a personal matter of hers."

"I just showed her what to do. I want to know if it works."

Spock regarded her skeptically. "You have no telepathic ability that I am aware of. How could you show her what to do?" At the end of the corridor the turbolift arrived, and someone began walking down the hall. "Come into my quarters and explain."

Nela followed him into the room, trying not to be too obviously curious. "I have low level empathic reception," she explained. "It isn't usually something I am much aware of, but in situations like this I've had to learn how to handle the emotions of another person. The most important thing is not to block, but to accept. Then you can choose how much of the feelings to keep, how much to drain away. If you let it all drain away, you can't be aroused yourself." Nela stopped and blushed furiously. Why on earth am I saying this to him, of all people?

"Fascinating." Spock was considering this analytically. "T'Siri has been blocking instead of channeling, causing a buildup of emotion until she cannot remain in contact with the person without overloading her controls. And she did not realize this?"

"No, sir. She did not know she could do both until I pointed it out to her." Nela wanted to be anywhere else but with Spock at this moment. She'd have welcomed a pitched battle with the Klingons, all shields down.

Spock regarded her thoughtfully. "Thank you, Nela. You were a wiser choice as T'Siri's roommate than I knew." He turned to his desk. "It is getting late, and you are on early duty, are you not?"

Nela was glad to accept the hint. "Yes, Mr. Spock. Good night." She fled out the door to her own quarters.

★

As the door shut behind Spock, Kirk promptly forgot him. "What do you mean?"

T'Siri came up to him and rested her hand against his cheek. "I was blocking your emotions, and they had no place to go. If I can accept them, they will not fight for admittance, and I will not have to pull away."

"Can you do that?" Kirk asked gently. He took her palm and kissed it. She did not flinch.

"Once I decide to accept, there is no longer a problem. And I decided to accept, Jim. You are ... desirable ... to me."

"That's my line," he murmered, kisses starting to work up her arm. "Since the day you and I were in Sickbay, I've thought about this. I was beginning to fear it was going to be only a dream." He'd reached her neck, stopped by the high collar of her sul-ken.

T'Siri showed him the fastenings. The robe dropped to the floor, and she wore nothing underneath.

"Now is that something!" Kirk said admiringly. He wasn't looking at the robe on the floor.

"Undergarments on Vulcan are illogical. They are not needed for warmth." T'Siri felt for the fastening of Kirk's tunic. "Starfleet uniforms, however, are not logical. How is this fastened?"

"It's not hard when you're used to it." Quicker than she would have expected, Kirk's uniform was beside her robe. For a moment they continued to look at each other, then were suddenly together. His hands were touching, exploring, and for a moment the nearness of him grew almost too much.

"Slowly, please, Jim. I ... I must adjust to this."

Instantly contrite, Kirk apologized. "I don't want to hurt you. But, God, you're beautiful." He cupped one hand around a breast and kissed the nipple. There were two sensations, the physical one that spread along her nerves and died out, the mental one that did not lessen.

"May I try something?" she asked hesitantly.

Kirk gave her a questioning look. "Experimenting?"

"I think I can feel what you feel, if I do this right." She ran one finger along his arm. "I can! I know what you feel as I touch you."

"Then try here." He guided her hand where he wanted it to go. His back arched in reaction to her touch, and she collapsed against him, eyes wide. Arm around her waist, Kirk led her into the other room. Huskily he said, "You've got to show me what to do. Don't wait to see what I feel; show me what <u>you</u> feel." He sat down on the bunk and pulled her down into his arms.

"I don't know. I've never had to know before." She reached up to him slowly, still afraid. "But start with this kissing. I missed some of the potential of it, earlier." As their lips touched, T'Siri let all of her barriers disappear, accepting without question whatever sensation passed between them. She was aware that somehow he was receiving this back from her; that he was feeling her sensations as well as his own and knew exactly when she was pleased with what he did. His experienced hands experimented with sensations, and she slowly learned to try again what seemed to please them most.

Much later T'Siri said contritely, "I hope I was at least able to prevent anyone on board from knowing what we were doing, or you are going to have a <u>very</u> frustrated crew."

Kirk lay beside her, one hand lightly tracing out the muscles on her back. It was not erotic, merely pleasant, and she fed the sensation back to him. "Well, the feeling of satiation you are sending now ought to take care of that."

T'Siri gave him a shamefaced look. "There is more to be learned here than I thought." She did her best to blank out anything she might be sending. "I think I shall need extra meditation time if we are going to make a regular thing out of this."

"That's better," Kirk said, removing his hand. "I only 'read' you now when I touch you."

Propping herself up on her elbows, T'Siri went on thoughtfully, "There is also more to this human/Vulcan dichotomy than I understood. I do not seem to be able to keep my two halves as separate as Spock seems to do. They are very much intertwined. I enjoyed this just as much as a Vulcan as I did as a human. Or am I just forgetting to be a Vulcan?"

"Do you think you love me?"

"<u>What</u> a question. No, I do not think so."

"<u>Then</u> you're still a Vulcan. Human women have a need to love anyone they make love to. Do you understand that?"

"Again, no."

Delighted, Kirk kissed the back of her neck. "You don't even have the Human need to try to be what you are not. And you haven't asked me if I love you."

"Do you?" T'Siri asked, curiosity aroused.

"You are a beautiful woman I desire very much. I enjoy talking to you and

being with you. You're the sister of my closest friend, and I am very fond of you. But no, I do not love you."

"You, at least, have the Human need to explain. You think I shall be hurt if you just say 'no'."

"I've hurt you enough. I don't want to add to it." Kirk rolled over and sat up. "Ouch. What the hell .... "

It was a piece of black wire. "One of my hairpins," T'Siri said. "I expect you will find more." Her fastened braids had all come unlooped, hanging straight down her back. She rolled over and sat up as well. "I shall need them. I cannot leave here with my hair loose like this." She collected all her pins and began putting up the ends of her braids.

"No one will see you here."

"There are sure to be people around on my deck. Ensigns live in very crowded quarters. Do you want anyone who can understand what I made them feel earlier to know for sure what it was?" Suddenly the junior officer was eyeing her captain dubiously.

"Discipline." Kirk made a face. "It's hypocritical."

"No. It is necessary. I understand that."

"You're being Vulcan again."

"I am what I am, Human and Vulcan together." T'Siri sighed, propping her chin on her knees. "I wonder, would a full Vulcan have been able to do this?"

"I think I have heard exactly as much as I want to about real Vulcans and part Vulcans. Don't worry about it so much. Listen to yourself: I am what I am. And believe yourself." He took her in his arms once more and kissed her firmly. "And you'd better go. I have to be on duty in a couple of hours."

"Get Spock to take it for you." T'Siri hid her smile on Kirk's shoulder.

"Listen to the woman. You are much too easily corruptible, I think." Kirk was laughing softly. "Will Nela notice if you don't sleep at home again tonight?"

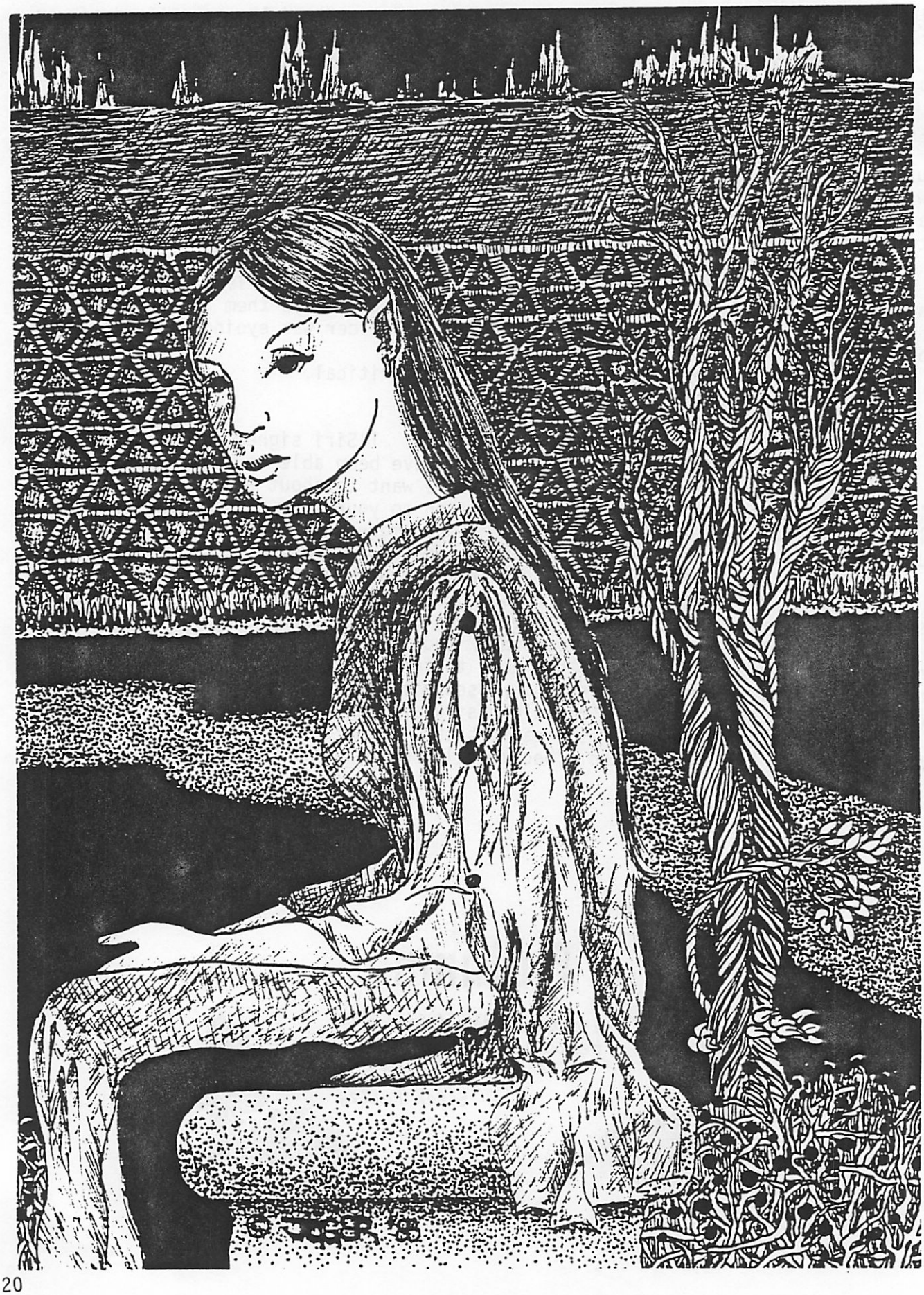
"It will not matter. Who do you think made me come back up here this evening." T'Siri rose and shook out her gown to forstall questions. "I shall be here, Jim." T'Siri bent over Kirk and kissed him one last time. The she disappeared out the door in a rustle of Vulcan silk and ribbon.

The captain of the Enterprise leaned back against the head of his bed with a contented sigh. Life had suddenly become a lot more interesting, and he approved.

Autumn

One golden leaf drifts down
bearing dream promises
I awake fulfilled

-- Ellen Hulley



Winter, Haunt Us Now

by Schaezendur

T'Peth put her sewing aside gingerly when the door signalled. *Why didn't they call first?* she thought absently, and stood. She checked her reflection in the glass window that overlooked the garden and smoothed her tunic before opening the door.

An embarrassed half-smile slid slowly from the face of the alien who stood on her doorstep. T'Peth did not speak, but identified him mentally. *With hair that color, Terran. Then not what I had thought -- surely no Vulcan would send a Human as messenger.* She nodded in greeting. "May I assist you?"

He opened his mouth, then closed it, obviously struggling for words. "I believe ... I'm in the wrong place, ma'am."

She began to think and speak in Standard English. "Where do you wish to be?"

"Uh, well, I was told --" He stopped, passed a sleeve over his damp forehead.

"I have been remiss. Please come in out of the heat," T'Peth said, swinging the door wide.

"Thank you, but --" He seemed incredibly uncomfortable.

"I have cool drinks and a pleasant room in which to speak," she urged. Her own discomfort increased slightly as she watched him perspire. "When you are more comfortable, I will help you find the place you seek."

He rolled his eyes. "Oh, hell, why not?" he muttered, and stepped past her into the cool stone hallway. T'Peth allowed herself a moment of amusement -- he had obviously not intended that such a remark be overheard. Without speaking further, she showed him to the main room of the house, decorated tastefully in neutral tones with highlights of blue and burgundy, and plentifully supplied with comfortable chairs and couches. She did not wait for him to sit, but left him and went into the kitchen to prepare a tray. She chose an herbal tea she had known from her student days, a variety of flavorings, and arranged them carefully on the tray with glasses and serving implements, and returned quietly to the sitting room.

The Human was closely examining a picture that hung near an arched hallway. It was a landscape, one of T'Peth's favorites, which showed a torrential flood rushing down a high-walled canyon. In the distance a town was suggested by the reflection of lightning on regular, squared shapes. The man turned around. "A Billings?" T'Peth set the tray down and took a seat near a small table.

"Yes. You know Billings?" She studied him while pouring the tea. He was tall, taller than her by several centimeters. His shoulders were wide, his waist lean, his clothing -- upper middle class, she guessed. His face was strong-boned, his eyes a piercing blue, his hair pale.

"I've seen a few of its works," he replied. She noticed the length of his hair -- longer than Starfleet regulations permitted, so perhaps he was from one of the merchant ships that docked at the Spaceport nearby.

She poured her own drink and sipped it, keeping her eyes down now. She knew he would be curious, as all are, and would want to examine her as well, and she did not wish to embarrass him by catching him staring. *Will he see me as I see myself?* In her mind's eye, a picture formed. She saw a Vulcan female, small, slight of

build, black hair falling straight down to the small of her back. Large eyes, face regular of feature. She was wearing a soft, dun-colored tunic that opened at the elbow and hip to allow ease of movement, black trousers, and slippers. *I should wear some color,* she thought irrelevantly, and sipped her tea.

"Ma'am," the man said quietly, "I thank you for your hospitality, but I should go."

"Can I help you find your destination?" she asked.

"No, thank you. I think I should just get back to my ship. I -- do appreciate your time -- and this." He gestured to the tray.

T'Peth stood as he did. "If I can assist, please tell me."

Awkwardly silent, they walked to the door. The Human opened it and moved into the strong sunlight. "Thank you," he repeated. "Maybe -- I'll see you later." He walked off rapidly, and T'Peth closed the door.

A strange encounter.

She caught sight of herself in a decorative mirror and paused. She had forgotten about her bruised cheek and forearms, but the color was still dark enough to be noticeable. Her self-imagined picture shattered like a thrown porcelain doll, and she fought back a tearing anguish as she returned the tray to the kitchen.

★

Idly fingering Rigellian silkweb in a small shop, T'Peth gradually became aware that she was being observed. She was certainly used to it by now, but somehow this regard was different. She circled the table, pretending interest in a bolt of shimmering silverstreak, and looked around. To her surprise, she saw the Human who had been such a strange visitor some days before.

He smiled hesitantly, then walked toward her. "I thought at first I was mistaken," he said, offering a hand.

T'Peth recalled the Terran custom and allowed his cool fingers to close over hers briefly, shielding her mind with the ease of long practice. "Mistaken?" she questioned.

"I didn't think I'd see you again --" He broke off. "May I repay your hospitality and take you to lunch?"

T'Peth took a breath, intending to refuse. But an insidious vision of her empty home flashed before her. "Yes," she replied.

He seemed surprised at her agreement. "Where -- where would you like to go?"

"I do not dine out often," she replied. "Surely there is some place that you prefer." *I do not dine out. Ever. Perhaps this will be interesting.*

"Well, there's a place near the spaceport --" The human seemed indecisive, as if suddenly regretting the blurted invitation.

"Whatever you recommend," she answered.

"It's quite a distance -- but I've rented a flitter. Or would you prefer a public transport?"

"Your vehicle will serve." *He is nervous. I do not understand it. We are a peaceful people -- he has nothing to fear from me.*

The trip, mercifully quick, was silent. The man guided her into the restaurant, and was given a corner table, almost completely shielded from the main floor. It was an elegant room, almost out of place in the spaceport district.

"I -- don't even know your name," he blurted out after they were seated.

"It is T'Peth," she replied. "The surname is difficult to render into your language, and is only indicative of clan and standing."

"My name is Pallan Angstern," the man told her. He spoke as if offering the name for her approval.

Another awkward pause ensued. *The Humans,* T'Peth decided, *seem to need conversation. They are not comfortable with silence.* "Did you reach your intended destination after you left my home?"

Unaccountably, he flushed. "I must confess. I had been told, in a round-

about way, that your home was where one could find ... that it was ... a pleasure house of sorts." He forced the words out, and his extreme distress caused T'Peth to examine their context closely.

The translation is correct. Wearily she bowed her head. *Am I now the subject for discussion among aliens?*

"I'm sorry," Pallan said. He looked confused, if she understood his expression correctly. "I thought it was kind of strange ... such a place on Vulcan ...."

"What do you know of Vulcans?" T'Peth interrupted him.

"Well, I've read tapes -- general stuff --"

"Specifically, of their reproductive processes?" Somehow, she needed to make this Terran understand.

"Just some rumors ... I've heard something about a mating drive, every so many-odd years--" He would not meet her eyes.

She hesitated, deciding. "The rumors are true. The need to mate surfaces approximately every seven Terran years. If a male does not mate, he dies." She was blunt. "In some instances, there is no female. In cases of a spouse's premature death, pregnancy, or -- rarely -- a legal separation or divorce -- a surrogate is obtained."

She watched him until his eyes moved to meet hers. "I am such a woman."

He appeared to think it over. "It sounds like a difficult life."

"That is accurate. It is a time of great violence among Vulcan males. I will never marry, or bear children. Although it is not admitted, I am mostly ostracized by Vulcan society. The mating cycle is ... embarrassing to Vulcans. I am even more of an embarrassment."

"But ... how did you come to be in this position?" Pallan asked. T'Peth studied him closely. He seemed honestly interested. She could detect no signs of voyeurism or perversion, no revulsion.

"When I was quite young I was accidentally exposed to a severe dosage of radiation which made it impossible for me to bear children safely. No parent would allow me to bond with their son. I had few choices for my life. But this one allows me to pursue my own interests and not be ... forced ... to work with those who would despise me." The words, hard at first, poured out as if they had awaited release for many years.

"How do you support yourself?" Pallan asked.

"Each clan pays a small tariff, which is used to support the few of us who have undertaken this position. We are kept ... comfortably."

"I see," Pallan murmured. He tried to distract her. "Are you ready to order?"

In response, she tapped her selection into the automated menu. Pallan followed suit.

"Is that -- your occupation -- why you were so bruised the last time I saw you?" he asked, fidgeting with the linen napkin before him.

T'Peth nodded. "As I said, it is a time of violence. I do not enjoy it."

"I guess not," Pallan agreed. "Giving yourself over for what is essentially rape ... again and again ... can't be pleasant."

"'Rape'?" T'Peth was not familiar with the word.

"Sexual assault." Pallan sipped at a glass of wine. "I spent time in a medical clinic for a few years before I went to space, and I saw a few attack victims."

"That is not so much the problem," she said, slightly taken aback by the idea of a random sexual attack in a supposedly civilized society. "Every bonded Vulcan female must endure the same. What horrifies my society is that I encounter it with strangers, with no bond, no mental joining. It is that they cannot forget."

"Vulcans are telepaths -- I forget about that," Pallan admitted. "But what about this IDIC I keep hearing espoused?"

T'Peth smiled slightly, allowing the Human to see it. "IDIC is commendable -- except on a Vulcan's doorstep. Our ambassador to the Federation married a Human

woman -- his son was the victim of some of the worst prejudice I have ever observed."

"Yeah, I've heard of them. You know the son?"

"My parents owned a home quite close to theirs. We were schoolmates." She shook her head. "The 'despised hybrid' has achieved more than any of them, except perhaps his own father. He may yet surpass Sarek as well."

"What's the kid like? What does he do?" Pallan asked.

"Spock is first officer and science officer on a Federation starship. He was the only one who treated me as cordially as he did everyone. Even in school I was known to be unbonded, unable to propogate. It is a great shame. But to Spock, it never mattered."

"And his behavior was the exception, not the rule." T'Peth saw Pallan clench a fist. "Why do you stay?"

Concealing her startlement, T'Peth looked away. "Where else would a Vulcan go?"

Pallan nodded. Vulcans were notorious, among the known space-faring races, as the only ones who chose <u>not</u> to colonize. Less than one percent of their population lived or worked off-planet.

T'Peth continued. "Look -- at the serving area."

"The bar," Pallan corrected automatically, then shrugged. "Sorry."

She was not offended. "I am not so fluent in your language as I had thought. At the bar, the group. A Human, an Andorian, and a Saurian. I am the only 'native' here -- except perhaps the owner, who is in his office." She toyed with a drink. "Vulcans -- with few exceptions -- do not mix well with other races."

"I have never spoken with a Human before meeting you," T'Peth admitted, almost shyly. "I learned your language -- as I have learned many things -- out of boredom."

They leaned back as the robo server approached with their meal, and waited while it served, then busied themselves with the necessary adjustments -- seasonings, samplings, tasting of drinks -- before eating. Neither seemed inclined toward conversation with a meal; they ate almost silently, commenting only on the quality and taste of the food.

T'Peth, pushing her platter away slightly, watched as Pallan did likewise. The Human looked at her openly for several moments.

"Your entire life seems like such a waste, such a tragedy."

T'Peth looked away uneasily, and tried to turn the conversation from herself to a philosophical abstract. "Would not one Human sacrifice himself if it meant saving the lives of many?"

"Some would. Not all."

"I am performing essentially that same sacrifice."

"But death happens once. You endure constantly. For years, until you die. <u>That</u> is a waste. Plus, you don't receive what a Human would under similar circumstances."

"And what is that? A burial service?"

Pallan smiled briefly, and she knew he had understood her attempt at humor. "No. Gratitude. Respect."

T'Peth looked away. "I cannot change generations of ideals, and teachings. They are what has stood between us and barbarism."

"You know what else is sad?" he asked quietly. T'Peth felt him withdraw and he stared into his wine glass. She wondered what further sadness he perceived.

"Tell me."

"You'll never know how pleasant a sexual encounter can be. Even with someone you don't know well. If you treat each other with respect and honesty --" He shook his head. "It can be a warm exchange between friends."

T'Peth listened carefully. Was he making a sexual advance? She couldn't be

sure. She knew that she was somehow receptive to this alien -- this man. She chose her words with care. "How do you define 'friends'?"

Pallan stood up quickly. "I ... I didn't mean that. I only meant ... not that I wouldn't, but --"

T'Peth rose and placed a hand on his forearm. "I wished only to continue our discussion." She gestured at the tables, the nearby diners. "But perhaps not in so crowded a room."

Pallan relaxed visibly, his shoulders slumping. "Well, sure. Where would you like to go?"

T'Peth did not speak for a moment. She was again examining her words carefully. "I know that with many races, words can have double meaning, sometimes containing sexual innuendos. Without intending such, may we continue speaking at my home?"

"Without any extra meaning, yes. Just let me get the bill."

"I will join you near the exit." T'Peth excused herself, and went toward the public 'fresher in the building.

Again the short trip was uncomfortable and silent, except for T'Peth's occasional directions. She had the feeling that the Human was self-conscious about being seen with her -- a Vulcan female. He would have shipmates, friends to whom he would have to make explanations.

In her home, they settled into comfortable chairs facing the garden, only peripherally turned toward each other.

T'Peth seized the initiative. "You were saying that the act of procreation can be pleasant between friends."

Pallan was visibly startled for a moment. "Yes. Well, obviously sex doesn't have the same connotations for Humans as it does for Vulcans. It's for ... babies, of course, but it doesn't have to be. It can be an overpowering desire --" He paused.

"Vulcans are not accustomed to thinking in terms of desire," T'Peth told him. "We have desires, but they do not interfere with responsibility, and they do not -- excluding the mating time -- become overwhelming."

"But it's not always that way," Pallan continued after a moment. "Sometimes it's ... sharing an experience, something that can give new meaning to a relationship, or make you feel warm and accepted when you were an outsider before ...."

He trailed off when he saw T'Peth's eyebrows pull together. "I'm sorry," he said quietly. "I guess that was a little too close to home."

"I do not understand the metaphor," T'Peth replied, her voice strained despite her best effort. She understood all too well.

"It means that what's been said is too close to where you are, to what your own situation is."

She tilted her head to one side in acknowledgement. "It was ... an accurate summation."

"Being an outcast among your own people must be harder than being alone among strangers," Pallan almost whispered.

"But I know nothing else," T'Peth responded. "It has always been so for me."

"That is very unfortunate." Pallan was moving nervously in his chair. "If you could know ... acceptance, friendship ... you would never return to this life."

"But I would not be with others of my kind," T'Peth replied. "Although there are only a few women -- of my occupation -- we are known. Any Vulcan I encounter would respond as my people always have."

"Would it be so bad away from your people when they treat you the way they do?"

T'Peth stared thoughtfully out the window. She allowed several minutes to pass before she spoke. "Pallan, are you attempting to seduce me?"

The Human jumped defensively to his feet. "Ragnarok, no! I was -- not that you're not --"

She watched him curiously. "It is obvious from your reaction that my understanding of the meaning of the word 'seduce' is inaccurate."

He smiled. "Or merely that mine is different from yours."

"In the Standard English translation, 'seduce' means 'to tempt, to corrupt, to lead away from morality or duty'. I merely asked if you meant to sway me from my current life." She stared at Pallan as he sat down again. "What did you think I meant?"

He looked as uncomfortable as he had in the restaurant. "The ... common usage ... is to sway a person into ... sexual acts ...."

T'Peth nodded. "I see."

Pallan rushed on. "Not that I ... wouldn't, if you weren't Vulcan. You're very attractive, but --"

"Do you dislike Vulcans, then?"

"Oh, no. You -- Vulcans -- are so cool, so dignified all the time -- it creates an aura of unapproachability."

"I understand." *I know the feeling well.*

Pallan relaxed. He walked to the window and stared at the garden, but T'Peth realized that his thoughts were elsewhere. "I wish I could love you," he murmured quietly.

She knew he hadn't intended it for her ears, and so she did not speak. She stood watching him for several minutes, then walked away to a draped hallway, passing through the light curtains for a slight measure of privacy. She was confused, the foundations of her life trembling beneath her. Never had anyone spoken to her of desire -- or openly of the physical act between male and female. She should be affronted, should feel ... she strove to feel nothing, but could not control.

Cool hands closed on her shoulders, a mouth pressed itself to her neck. "Let me show you what love can be," Pallan murmured, his breath moving softly on her skin.

I should move away, should demand that he leave, should .... T'Peth found herself breathing faster as the previously unknown physical sensations following the touch of Pallan's hands made themselves felt in her. The cool pressure raised icy tingles below the surface of her skin and radiated to a place in the middle of her abdomen. She found herself experiencing, for the first time in her life, a strong desire to be held closely, to feel the contact of a body caring for her, wanting -- her. Not the woman, not the available female, but T'Peth the individual, uniquely herself.

She turned to face Pallan, and was surprised to see compassion and affection showing openly on his face. *I am too used to Vulcans,* she thought fleetingly.

A second time she marshalled her defenses, preparing to speak her denial, her refusal of him, but they were swept away by the increasing physical reaction rising inside of her, threatening to rush her away from all of the logic and rationality she had used as a basis for her very existence.

She opened her mouth to speak, but the words she had chosen fled, replaced by new ones. "Slowly, Pallan, slowly -- I am not accustomed to such turmoil --" She gasped as Pallan leaned forward and fastened his mouth onto the vein she could feel pulsing doubletime in her throat. Her hands closed about his back, not knowing whether to push him away or pull him closer.

Rationality -- patterns -- logic -- all were suddenly gone as T'Peth abandoned herself to the physical sensations that were so new as to be overwhelming. Pallan's hands roamed freely over her body, smoothing and gently caressing, in marked contrast to the violence to which she had become accustomed. She shivered unexpectedly when he ran his fingertips like feathers across her shoulders, and had to force herself to concentrate when she realized that Pallan was speaking.

"T'Peth. Is this what you want?" His tone, although soft, was somehow urgent. "Make no rash choices."

She struggled to comprehend. "Choices?"

"T'Peth. Now you will decide. Do we stop here, or continue?"

She shook her head, tossing her hair about. She let it obscure her eyes, desperately afraid for a moment that she would be revealed all too clearly to him,

as she had never been seen before. "Any choice I make now will be rash," she whispered, her voice tight with indecision. "If you stay -- I might -- I don't know. If you leave, I would always wonder --"

"Don't spend a lifetime wondering what you might have missed," he said quietly. "That would be the worst waste of all."

T'Peth turned to him. "I would not live out such an unhappy tale," she said, her heart seeming to increase its pace. "Instruct me in the ways of ... Human love."

Pallan smiled, almost sadly, it seemed. "Where shall we go?" he asked. He did not touch her now, as if he was aware of her sudden need for space.

T'Peth squared her shoulders slightly and led him down the cool, dim hallway to the rear of the house. She stood back and watched him enter, seeing the room now through his eyes, eyes of a stranger to the place.

The room was spacious, almost as large as the sitting room by the garden, but was darkened, a fire-pot flickering gently in one corner. A few comfortable chairs were arranged randomly about the room, but appeared rarely used, except for the padded chair and mat before the firepot. The bed in the opposite corner was almost an afterthought, and would have seemed slightly out of place but for the filmy material that draped and separated it from the rest of the room. Mostly the room was conducive to meditation -- quiet, dark, peaceful.

Pallan turned back to her, pulling her by the hand into the room. "It's very like you," he said. "Dark and mysterious --"

T'Peth felt her indecision return for a moment, but banished it firmly. "You are the holder of the mysteries now," she told him. He smiled at the double entendre, and pulled her into his arms. He kissed her gently and she responded in kind, familiar from her reading with this curious Terran custom.

To her surprise, the kiss raised unnervingly new sensations inside of her, and she now understood the Human infatuation for the odd ritual. This was a joining that Vulcans had apparently never considered, and that knowledge gave an added spice to the sensual tastes and reactions. This, T'Peth decided firmly, was something to which she could easily become accustomed.

Pallan pulled away, looked at her searchingly, then walked to the edge of the bed and sat down. As he began removing his boots, T'Peth watched him, and her resolve turned to daring. She touched the fastening of her skirt and stepped away from the garment and her shoes in one smooth motion. Her tunic ended less than halfway down her thighs, and she saw from Pallan's expression that he appreciated her action.

He moved into the center of the bed and T'Peth sat on the edge, unsure of her next move. But Pallan solved her dilemma by laying back and pulling her across his chest in one motion. She dipped her mouth to his, enjoying his kisses, while part of her awareness realized that his hands were roaming over her bare skin, slowly working the tunic up and away from her body.

His touches raised trails of feathery tingles under her skin, and she heard a moan come from deep in her throat before she realized who had made the sound. She pressed closer to him, wanting as much contact as possible.

Pallan worked her tunic off and rolled her to lie flat on her back, then sat up and began to run his hands over her in exploration. T'Peth abandoned herself to the physical sensations, not controlling her reactions when the man's mouth came down to one breast and pulled her nipple into aching erection.

He kissed her again, his intensity changing. He began concentrating on her body's responsive places until she trembled on the peak of arousal. His hands were skilled, tickling, rubbing, and soothing places in a way T'Peth had never been touched before, expert in gauging when to move on, where to stay and manipulate until she quivered, wishing to beg for more, but unable to speak.

Suddenly, the room was gone, Pallan was gone. The only thing in T'Peth's existence was her own body, pulsating with waves of pleasure such as she had never

dreamed existed.

Slowly they subsided, and T'Peth became aware of blood rushing through her veins, her automatic breathing, and a curious sense of lethargy hanging about her.

Pallan, his eyes tender, lay close beside her, a small smile curving his mouth. T'Peth drew a deep, shuddering breath. "Oh, Pallan," she whispered. "You have given such a rare gift ...."

"It's not over yet," he said, and smiled at her upraised eyebrow. "No, it's not going to be particularly better. But I want you to -- no, I'll show you and see if you can understand what I mean."

He leaned over her, covering her shoulders with his, and began kissing her again. But now he brought his own body into play against hers, and the tide of arousal began to rise in her again. He had pulled off his clothing, and T'Peth was intensely aware of the texture of his skin, his body hair, and his sexual readiness.

For a moment, memories swirled around her, reminding her of violence and mindless rutting. But Pallan's body was not burning hot, but deliciously cool; his hands were gentle, not confining, and his eyes were aware and affectionate. She dismissed the past and concentrated on the present, allowing herself to examine Pallan's body with her hands as closely as he had examined her.

Again, with expertise evident, Pallan brought T'Peth to the sensual throbbing that demanded more, and she cried out for him, moaned her desire for his presence within her. And he complied, soothing her, and staying with her almost convulsive movements. He murmured soothing words into her ear that she did not remember, and they held each other so tightly that T'Peth wondered fleetingly if she would hurt him.

Again, she lost everything but her wild pleasure, and Pallan. This time as the sensations peaked and began to ebb, T'Peth was aware of Pallan's presence, of his pleasure accompanying her own.

He shifted, moving his arm to pillow T'Peth's head. His cool breath touched her temple, and she realized that no meditative exercise had ever relaxed her thus, left her feeling so fulfilled.

After a time, Pallan stretched, yawned, and pulled a pillow under his head. T'Peth sat up and looked around, somehow expecting her surroundings, her very world to be different. But it was the same, and she realized that the newness was within herself.

"The gift -- so rare here --" she said into the room's stillness. "I see now. It is even more valuable when shared." She quoted. "'A gift given brings acceptance for two'. Now I understand."

Pallan stood up, gathered his clothing. "You do indeed. I'll be right back." He disappeared into the 'fresher, and T'Peth picked up her things and pulled a more casual robe from her wardrobe before leaving the room to use the guest bath.

When Pallan found her, T'Peth was sitting in a chair, staring pensively into the garden. The sun was just setting, throwing eerie shadows into the room. He sat down nearby, but did not speak. Finally, she looked at him. "I don't know whether to thank you or curse you," she told him. "You have changed my perceptions forever. But you won't be here forever, certainly." She shook her head. "Every time I endure -- what I must, I will remember."

Pallan touched a hand to her arm. "Look again. You don't have to live <u>here</u> -- <u>this way</u> -- for the rest of your life. You are both young and long-lived. And there are a thousand planets out there. On one of them you might find a <u>real</u> place for yourself. A goal for your life." He squeezed gently. "On another, you might find your heart's desire. Your soul-mate."

She looked at him, startled. "Don't be so shocked," he continued. "Almost everyone manages to find a love in their life. Why shouldn't you?"

T'Peth thought fleetingly of Sanil, unbonded, with whom she'd had a strong friendship. She had shut part of herself away when she'd been told that his clan had arranged a marriage for him.

"I see that you might have had a chance already," Pallan said. *Perceptive, that one.* "But it's not too late. Until you're on your deathbed, it's never too late."

He stood up. "I have watch tonight. But we don't lift for a few more days. I'll call, and if you want to see me ...."

T'Peth rose with him. "Please come back. I would welcome ... your company." She hesitantly tried a smile, and Pallan smiled back, then kissed the palm of her hand.

"I'll be back."

T'Peth waited as instructed until the time she knew that Pallan's ship was lifting off-planet. Curiosity was consuming her, but she made herself wait for several minutes more before picking up the small packet that Pallan had left for her.

She opened it slowly, and found a note, handwritten on paper, and another item, which she sat aside while she read.

T'Peth,

Knowing you, watching you learn and become confident in yourself and your rights as an individual has been a phenomenon of delight for me. Make your choices and live your life. Don't let others who don't know you dictate your path.

Remember your friend Spock? He made his own choices and by all reports he is satisfied with his life now. Break free of your society's bonds and make your own way. Believe in yourself!

Most of all, I wish for you a great love in your life. It will hurt, and feel wonderful, and you will never regret it.

My affection always,

Pallan

Bemused, she reached for the other item from the packet: an open-ended travel voucher. She could now travel whenever she chose -- if she ever so chose. It was unlimited in distance as well, and there was no expiration date. Pallan's unique signature filled the bottom corner.

A warm, melting affection suffused her. Pallan had presumed that sooner or later she would decide to break free of her position here. *He has much belief in his persuasions, then.*

She leaned back in her chair. She could decide, she had time. No one had called for her. She could leave today -- or stay forever. T'Peth reflected wryly that Humans could teach Vulcans much, if they could get their attention. She felt his gift -- the warm vivid memories of his affection and caring, the time and effort he had expended for her.

Nothing can be decided now, she realized. Time would crystallize the decision. she only hoped that she would know before the next time she would be needed.

The com-unit signalled.

The Other Shoe

by Leigh Caskey

She awoke slowly, confused by a furnace-like heat against her back. Gradually, as sleep dissipated, fragments of memory returned.

In her mind she saw him standing so close she could almost feel his heartbeat. She could feel his hands peeling her shirt from her shoulders, carressing the skin as it was exposed to his view. She remembered the breath that caught in her throat as he fondled the swelling globes of her breasts and the moans of pleasure that came when she became part of him and he of her.

God, what have I done? Escape was the first coherent thought to surface through the tangled layers of emotion that assailed her. Chiding herself, she cautiously eased her body away from his, only to discover her hair trapped beneath him. *Damn.* The movements caused him to stir restlessly in the small single bed. Taking advantage of those few seconds, she pulled her hair free as she slid quietly off the bed.

Standing for a moment at the side of the bed, she waited to see if he would waken. Watching him sleep, she tried not to remember, not to think. As she looked down at the man in her bed, the confusion and near panic that had been so much a part of her childhood, rose in her mind. She felt like a child again, torn by conflicting emotions and trapped in circumstances beyond her control or understanding. Now as then, her only thought was to run away and leave all the confusion behind. Later, she would need to think, to evaluate, but now she just wanted to get away. Yanking on her clothes, she continued silently toward the exit, grabbing her shoes on the way. Reaching the door, she glanced back at his sleeping form in her bed, and left the room.

Late in the Gamma shift, the halls were still dim in the half-light of the artificial night as she leaned against the door to her quarters. As a child the feeling of "if-I-could-just-get-away-from-this-place-it-would-all-be-better" had led her to fight her way to the top of her class and a chance to attend medical school. Now, she just wished she could run away from everything that had happened last night.

To leave seemed important, but where could she go on a starship in space? The idea of running away was appealing, but where could she go? The entire situation seemed so unreal. Hesitating, unable to decide on where to go or what to do, she shoved her feet into her shoes. Running shoes. She looked down at her clothes -- her gym clothes. The clothes he had so carefully removed and she had less carefully scrambled into were the same.

The habit of running had started in childhood. A mother who frequently requested her only child to "go away" had led to libraries, and when the libraries closed, to the open parks and streets. At first running was a skill used to avoid streeters and peacemen; later it had become almost a form of relaxation. During school she used to run when the pressures of exams and the need to do well (extremely well to keep the scholarships and free tuition) seemed to build up. But then it felt like she was running toward something ... a future that had to be better than the past had been.

And it was. She had a job she loved and friends she was comfortable with. In

short, a life that was quite satisfying. Damn it, she wasn't a starry-eyed kid anymore, you accepted that you couldn't have everything you wanted and you lived life the best you could with what you had. Why did this have to happen?

None of this would have happened if she had been on the track yesterday evening instead of in her quarters. If she had just gone when she first meant to, but oh, no, she had to stay late and start those tests on the samples the contact team delivered. If the track hadn't been down when she originally wanted to run, none of this would have happened. Damn Sulu, for choosing that particular time to try and hook in some kind of monitoring tie-in. *Might as well damn Scotty and the Interfleet games too,* she thought. If Scotty hadn't talked her into competing ("We've got a reputation to uphold, lass"), Sulu wouldn't have tried to set up a training program on the computer, and the track wouldn't have been closed when she wanted to use it. If ... if ... if she hadn't been entered in those damn games she wouldn't have been so concerned about missing that training run, and she wouldn't have been in her cabin when he came by, and none of this would have happened.

"And if you believe that, you really are stupid," she murmured, looking at her feet in their running shoes. The shoes provided her with a focus and a destination: the track. Pushing herself away from the door, concentrating only on putting one foot in front of another, she headed toward the recreation deck.

★

He awoke quickly and completely, recognizing his location immediately. Even before he turned to reach for her he knew she was gone. It was much later than his usual rising time; normally, he never slept so deeply. Curious, that last night could have altered something as basic as his sleep patterns. If he was to be on the bridge at the beginning of the alpha shift, he would have to prepare for the day more rapidly than usual.

★

Lt. Uhura was looking forward to the end of the alpha shift with more than the usual anticipation. The entire shift had been a pain in more than one part of her anatomy. With the captain overriding her communications board for reports that were in the process of coming in if he would just wait, and Spock doing something that bypassed her board entirely, the day was going from bad to worse. She should have reported for sick call as soon as she recognized the first ill omen and spent the day in bed.

From the moment she stepped on the bridge that morning Uhura knew the shift would be a disaster. Mr. Spock was always on the bridge before anyone else, except perhaps the captain. Sometimes Uhura thought he must pull out a bunk (carefully concealed in the Science Section) and spend the night at his station. But this morning he arrived after she did and only minutes before the captain. The captain was almost fifteen minutes late; Uhura couldn't ever remember both of them being late. It was an omen no one with roots on the United African Commonwealth could ignore.

Chekov's cultural heritage was also alerted by the morning's unusual happenings. By the time the captain appeared, Sulu had been informed of more Russian axioms than he would normally have heard in a week of red alerts.

The morning portion of the shift seemed to crawl by as the captain ordered a complete engineering check (he claimed the chronometer in his quarters was malfunctioning). The bridge was quiet except for the occasional reports from Mr. Scott's crews (reports that never came quickly enough for the captain in his present mood). Even Mr. Spock seemed to have retreated into his computers.

At the meal break, Uhura, Sulu, and Checkov compared notes and wished for something to break the captain's mood. Chekov was of the opinion that even Klingons would be welcome, for at least during a red alert the captain wouldn't be drumming his fingers and making his navigator nervous.

Sulu attempted to lighten his friends' depression by recounting the crew's preparations for the Inter-fleet track and field games to be held on Starbase 2. He failed dismally once he mentioned the current favorite in Scotty's betting pool (with a personal best time of 1:45 in the half, 3:07 in the full, and 6:24 in the ultra marathon) had collapsed on the track.

"But she must win. I have betted on her." Chekov was understandably upset with Sulu's disclosure.

"Pavel! Is she all right now?" Uhura was not as concerned about her bet.

"Yeah, I guess. Anyway, I reported it to Dr. McCoy."

"Vill she still run in the games?"

"Honestly, Pav, I almost hope the captain drums his fingers until you run screaming off the bridge." Uhura turned all her attention to Sulu. "Do you know what happened?"

"Well, I've been working on this monitor tie-in to the rec computer to help everyone train for the games. It has this direct feed ...."

"Is that why the track's been closed?"

"Shut up, Pav."

"Anyway, this hook-up monitors the condition of everyone who uses the facilities, for training purposes and some study that Dr. McCoy is doing. I think it involves the effect of ...."

"Sulu!" Uhura realized that Sulu was not a storyteller who got quickly to the point; enough was enough. And at the rate he was going, lunch break would be over and she'd never know the full story.

"Okay. Okay. When I went to practice fencing this morning she was already there. I noticed her data when I logged on. According to the computer she logged on real early this morning and ran like a ... Horta in heat. She had already beaten her personal best time for the half and was well on her way to breaking the current game record for the 50K."

Uhura and Chekov listened with the patience of long practice. Finally, Chekov could wait no longer. "But, vhat happened? Will she run fast like that in the games?"

Ignoring the interruption, Sulu continued, "There were signs of increasing physical distress on the monitor but the warnings weren't activated. I guess I don't know as much about computers as I thought I did. But, maybe when Dr. McCoy was messing with the data printout yesterday he ...."

"Sulu," even Uhura's patience was at an end. "There are only 15 minutes left before we have to return to the bridge, so finish the story."

"As I watched her, the data went crazy; I looked up just in time to watch her fold up. I ran over, got her some oxygen, and she recovered," said Sulu in one breath.

"And?"

"She said she must have pushed it too hard after missing a day."

"And?"

"And what, Uhura? That's it. Chris ran, Chris passed out, Chris woke up, Chris left. What more do you want?" Having to rush through a story on top of the engineering check was enough to make Sulu irritable.

"There's something funny about this. I know Chris slows down when we run together, but .... You know, Sulu, you've heard her running lecture, 'Pace yourself, don't push it.' You make it sound like the chetahs of Madimba were at her heels."

"Vell, I hope she runs that fast at the games." Chekov stood up and prepared to return to the bridge. He was counting his probable winnings at 4 to 1 as Uhura burst in on his thoughts.

"Pavel," in disgust Uhura rose to face the navigator, "I'm going to tell the captain you really want to be on the wrestling team for the games but are too shy to ask."

Sulu laughed at the expression on Chekov's face as he listened to Uhura's

threat. His friend would have to lose at least 5 kilos to be on the team and Chekov's hatred of dieting was equalled only by the captain's. Chekov followed Uhura out into the hall, exclaiming that she had misunderstood and that his bet meant nothing, nothing compared to the good health of his friend, Chris. Sulu walked close behind and Uhura smiled for the first time since coming on the bridge. All three entered the bridge hoping the second half of the shift would be better than the first half.

"I'm glad you three decided to join us." The captain then proceeded to order a complete system check of the entire Science Station. His mood had not changed. Resigned to their fate, the three took their positions. Chekov fleetingly wished for Klingons as he bent over his station and began his portion of the check.

Captain James T. Kirk knew he was being a "real shit," to quote his chief medical officer, but he didn't care. After God-knows how many evenings of playing chess at the same time and the same place to have Spock simply not show up was ... well, it certainly wasn't logical. And this morning nothing, just a "Good morning, Captain."

And this mission, star-mapping (as always),was boring and this star-mapping mission had to be the most boring ever. There wasn't even a planet within reasonable range. It was as though the whole Federation wanted nothing to interrupt his boredom.

Maybe that was why the complete engineering check seemed like such a good idea. At least requesting reports gave him something constructive to do. The science section check was merely because the first one went so smoothly; it was over before he had thought of something else to kill time. He was glad that the Federation had such high regard for his Science/Astronomy section, but this "milk run" was making him crazy. Well, at least the Inter-fleet games were coming up. And if Scotty's betting pool was right, it should relieve the dullness of routine, plus backing his crew should make him a few credits.

Dr. Leonard H. McCoy was finished for the day. As he cleared off his desk and prepared to close up his office, there was a crashing sound. Walking quickly to the research lab, McCoy opened the door. At first glance the lab seemed to be deserted, and he turned to leave, thinking he imagined the sound.

"Damn."

"Chris, you here?" McCoy hit the control panel near the door and flooded the room with light.

"Back here, Len." A voice came from the back of the lab behind the chemical testing equipment. "On the floor, I dropped a ...."

"Christine A. Chapel. Damn it, what are you doin' here? You were supposed to go off duty hours ago." McCoy crossed the room and glared at his colleague and friend. "I told you to go to your quarters, not to go play in the lab."

"You also said you wanted the results of the chemical analysis on that sample Riley and the contact team brought back. And with all the systems checks, the medical section was short handed."

"That was before Sulu told me you passed out on the track."

"I didn't pass out ... I just leaned against the wall and closed my eyes for a minute."

"Christine." Irritation filled every letter of her name as McCoy reached out a hand and pulled her to her feet.

Dr. Christine Chapel dropped the shattered glass into the lab disposal. "Okay, Len, so I pushed it a little too hard. Hand me the spray adhesive, I cut my hand."

McCoy took the injured hand in his. "Damn it, Chris, why didn't you say something? This is going to need sealing."

Grumbling, McCoy half-pulled Chapel over to an examination area and pushed her into a chair. "If you had gone to your quarters this wouldn't have happened. It's your own fault if it hurts."

McCoy quickly cleaned and bandaged the wound. After finishing he leaned back and looked directly into her face. "Wanna talk about it?"

"Len, there's nothing to talk about. With the Inter-fleet games coming up I stupidly pushed too hard. It won't happen again. Anyway, you'll be pleased with the analysis on Riley's team's ...."

"Forget the sample. According to Sulu's printout, it was a lot more than just leanin' against the wall because you were tired of running." McCoy took a breath and stood up. He walked over to the supply cabinet and replaced the items he had used to treat her hand. Turning, he tried to think of a way to broach the subject he thought was bothering her.

Chapel stood and crossed to the lab computer. "All the information on the sample has been entered. If you're going to be working in here, you'll need to turn on the intercom. Goodnight, Doctor."

"Chris, wait." She paused at the door. McCoy frantically searched for a reason to keep her where he could talk to her. The intercom light was flashing ... while she was working, Chris had set it on "Emergency Only" and all incoming messages had been recorded. "There's a message for you."

"If it's important, they would have overridden the code."

McCoy reached out and hit the PLAY control. Spock's voice filled the room.

"Christine, report to my office at 1930. Spock out."

The only sound in the room was the computer reporting that the message had been received. Chapel's knuckles whitened as she gripped the side of the door.

The sound of Spock using a first name and Chris' first name at that, made McCoy's decision easier. "Chris, I'm not a nosey ol' busy-body lookin' for a good piece of gossip. You may have broken a few running records this morning, but you weren't doin' yourself any good. You disregarded a direct order and I find you practically locked in the lab breaking equipment."

Not turning from the door, she replied. "I don't consider 'why don't you' a direct order, the door to the lab wasn't locked and I only dropped one piece of equipment. Will there be anything else, Dr. McCoy?"

The doctor walked over and put his hands on her shoulders. He could feel the tension in her body. "Chris, I was checking on Yeoman Crandall this morning before alpha shift." He paused and continued, "I ... I saw him leaving your quarters."

"Would you believe me if I said I don't know what you're talking about?"

"No, I don't think I'd believe that."

"Would you believe that I don't want to talk about it?"

"Yes, that I would believe. But I'm not offering you a choice."

With a quick twist, Chapel turned and left McCoy's hands resting on empty air. "Whatever you think you saw, Doctor, it was my personal business."

McCoy's voice rose to match hers. "Anything that affects your performance as a crewmember is my business, Doctor."

"How? What's wrong with the way I've handled my duties? Thanks to me the work on Riley's samples is finished ...."

McCoy crossed his arms and calmly broke into her speech. "Well, for one thing, you're yellin' at me."

Chapel took a deep breath and slowly exhaled. "Sorry, Len, I guess I'm a little tired. I ... I didn't sleep well last night." *Shit, that was stupid. Why did I say that? That's almost an admission that something did happen.*

"I didn't realize you were having trouble sleeping, Chris. Let's go into my office." McCoy carefully schooled his voice and face to reflect only polite concern as he proceeded to bully her into his office.

"Welcome to my consulting room and bar," he said as he gestured her to take a chair.

"Len, I'm familiar with the kindly ol' doctor routine; there's nothing wrong. I'll go to bed early, get a good night's sleep, and promise not to yell at you any more. Okay?"

"Sit."

Once she was seated, McCoy poured them both a drink from his private medical

supply of Suarian Brandy and sat on the edge of his desk. "This is just what you need to help you relax and get a good night's sleep." McCoy was never one to let friendship intefere with his view of medical duty.

"Len, you are without a doubt the bossiest doctor in Starfleet." Chapel raised her glass in mock salute and took a swallow. Some of the stress began to disappear from her features as the brandy began to relax her.

McCoy took another drink and asked quietly, "What's wrong, Chris?"

She looked deeply into the glass and swirled the liquor as though to discover the answer hidden there. "What exactly are you asking, Len?"

"Well, we can start with why you were running so hard this morning?"

"I explained that. I want to do well in the games and I just pushed too hard." She paused for a moment and then looked at him with a small smile, "Don't you want to win your bet?"

McCoy put down his glass and put on his best "doctor" face. "Don't try and change the subject. I've known you for too many years to believe that one." It was his turn to smile, "I've heard too many of your exercise lectures to injured crew-members."

Chapel jerked the glass to her lips and drained the amber liquid. Her light blue eyes turned icy as she stared at McCoy. Undaunted, McCoy stared back. It was her gaze that yielded first.

"Now that we've got that settled, can we get on with our discussion?" McCoy was determined to continue probing. In truth her performance on the track had scared him more than he was willing to let her know. It all went back to one of his grand-daddy's cardinal rules of medicine ... when people start acting crazy, something's usually wrong.

And Chris's behavior was outside the normal for her. McCoy quickly sifted through his mental file of psych-profiles and measured her recent behavior against a gut feeling. He let silence fill the office as he reviewed everything he could remember about Dr. Christine Chapel.

★

Christine A. Chapel, Doctorate in Research Biology, graduated magna cum laude from Starfleet Medical, a culmination of a series of scholastic and track scholarships. Only military experience prior to serving on the Enterprise was Officer Candidate School. Took position as Head Nurse when budget cuts eliminated the biological research section. Still supervised most of the medical research in addition to her nursing duties. Professional background included several off-world research assignments and the associated technical papers before coming to the Enterprise. Psych-profile showed a very intelligent, highly independent, disciplined personality. That was evident in her choice of career and hobby (research and running). Her acceptance of the nursing position had surprised him. He had found her unique mixture of understanding, empathy, efficiency, humor and just plain stubbornness ideally suited to the way he ran his medical section. All the organizational abilities she used in her methodical research she brought to that job also. At 32, she was respected as a competent professional in both research and nursing.

Her off-duty hours were a combination of a carefully planned running program, independent research activities, and ... and what? The p-file told him something about her personal life before coming on board. And since then the Psi-2000 virus and the "Android/Roger Korby" incident had added a little more information, but he was suddenly very aware that he didn't know Chris as well as he thought he did.

★

As McCoy waited for her to break the quiet that lay heavy in his office, it dawned on him that Chapel was a very private person -- one who tended (on purpose? force of habit?) to maintain a very low profile.

The thoughts whirling through Chapel's mind were reflected only in the straight-

ening of her spine and in the stiffening of her shoulders. She knew McCoy was trying to force her to be the first to break the silence. It was an "ol' technique" of his and one he used as effectively as bullying. *It's going to work, too,* she thought grimly. Anything was better than the privacy of her own thoughts. Chapel looked at the empty glass clutched in her hands and took a deep breath. "It would seem that you have some speculations on .. various unusual aspects of ... last night." Each word appeared to be carefully selected to reveal nothing to aid in his probing.

The Starfleet physician felt like cheering. If she was talking, then there was a chance he could get to the bottom of this and his medical section could get back to normal.

★

A few seconds before 1930, Christine Chapel was standing in front of the door to Spock's office. After her talk with Dr. McCoy ("Damn it, Chris, you're as closed-mouthed as a Derebian shell-clam. Can't you see I'm only tryin' to help?"), she had hurriedly showered and changed in her office. She had decided to present as professional an image as possible under the circumstances. *After all,* she thought as she signalled for admittance, *maybe he simply wants an expansion on the test results of the samples the contact team brought back. I'm a professional; I can handle this like a professional. I'll say "Yes, sir," a lot and get out fast.*

The meeting, initially, went quite well. Spock requested further clarification on an equipment requisition for her lab and asked for her opinion on an additional series of tests for two of the vegetation samples the contact team brought back. Neither of them alluded to any topic that could remotely be considered personal. It was the totally professional meeting Chapel had hoped for.

The impersonal atmosphere of the meeting lulled her into a false sense of security; obviously, last night was an aberration they both had chosen to ignore. She relaxed enough to lean back in the chair and accepted the cup of tea Spock offered. The bitter orange-flavored tea reminded her stomach that she had skipped the meal break and Chris decided to drink quickly and make an excuse to leave.

Spock's next remark destroyed her carefully cultivated composure. He spoke directly about personal topics that she had hoped to avoid. She tried to direct the conversation elsewhere, but Spock was determined. Placing her empty tea cup on the desk, she stood up and broke into his speech.

"Spock, you're making assumptions. Sex is just that ... sex. It doesn't mean ... it takes more than sex for ... for ...." Her voice trailed off.

"For marriage?"

"For any kind of long term commitment." She dropped her head for a moment, and rubbed the back of her neck in an effort to ease some of the building tension.

Spock reached out to touch her, perhaps to help ease the tightness of the knotted muscles, but she quickly ducked away from his hand, moving out of reach. Confused, he let his hand drop and stared at her. This was not the way it was supposed to happen. According to his observations of Human behavior (specifically the Enterprise crew's), sex brought two people closer together. Humans seemed to use it as an extension of communication on an non-verbal level. Last night should have made her recognize him as a potential mate. "Christine, our intimacy was a prelude to this discussion. I fail to understand your current attitude."

Chapel carefully studied the design on the tea cup. Spock stood unmoving, waiting for her explanation. As the quiet continued for several minutes, he forced himself to control his rising anxiety over the continued silence. She tried to force her jumbled thoughts into some kind of order. Spock was sincere in his proposal, that was apparent; but, the impossibility of the situation was to her just as apparent. Turning to face him, she tried what she believed to be an extremely logical approach. "Last night we had sex, that's all. I can accept that. Why are you trying to make it into something more?"

"From my observations of Human behavior, and specifically your behavior ...."

So much for the logical approach. "As far as my behavior goes, I have a great deal of respect for you as a scientist and as my commanding officer."

"Was it respect for me as a scientist that brought you to my quarters to inform me of the course change to Vulcan? Was it because I am your commanding officer that during the Psi-2000 epidemic you ...."

Why do Vulcans have to have total recall, she thought. Interrupting once again, Chris tried another approach. "Spock, try to see it from my point of view. For almost four years we were so polite to each other it was almost painful."

"Christine, I do not understand how my behavior ...."

"Just listen. Okay?"

Spock slowly lowered his eyebrow and nodded patiently. Carefully selecting her words, she continued. "Then our relationship, such as it was, developed into a ... hesitant truce. And over the past six or seven months the truce seemed to have evolved into a ... a friendship."

"It was 6.58 months ago I made my decision. Since then I have tried to let you know my thinking."

Chapel thought back over the past few months, remembering the "special research" assignments which had necessitated working together, and the way he and Kirk "just happened" to be in the gym or on the track during her workouts. Was that "courting" Vulcan-style?

Spock watched her face closely as a variety of emotions traveled through her eyes. Had she not known his intent? If that was true, then how was the previous night possible?

It didn't matter, Chapel decided, she had decided on the best course of action for this situation. "I just don't believe an ... arrangement ... between us is a good idea." There, she had said it. *Now, please God, just let him drop it,* Chris prayed as she started for the door.

None of this was making any sense. Logically Spock considered her words and actions, but he could draw no acceptable conclusions. "If that is true, then do you have an explanation for our "arrangement" last night?"

His question might have been logical, but it certainly didn't seem fair. *Couldn't he tell I don't want to talk about any of this? Why doesn't he just let it alone?* "Last night doesn't enter into this discussion. You're talking about more than an occasional sex partner."

"Our physical relationship of last night was the catalyst for this discussion. Vulcans do not engage in, I believe the term is, 'sleeping around'."

"And you think I do?" It was getting harder and harder for her to maintain any semblance of emotional control.

"Christine," Spock placed his hands on her shoulders and turned her to face him. "I am at a loss to understand your reluctant attitude. Until 17.35 minutes ago I was under the impression that our relationship was settled. That you were to be my wife." He paused for a moment and continued, "You told me you loved me."

Chapel attempted to pull away, but his hands tightened on her shoulders. Unable to escape his grasp, she refused to look at him, focusing her eyes on the floor. "Just forget it. It was all a mistake." Standing toe to toe, she took a deep breath and put all remaining composure and pride into her next statement. "Now that this topic has been exhausted, I'd like to leave, Commander."

He wondered fleetingly if Sarek had found his mother this contradictory when he had brought up the subject of marriage. Spock thought about what he knew of Human behavior and reached the only logical conclusion possible. He had often witnessed Dr. McCoy use anger as a smokescreen to hide his concern, and Humans seemed capable of using their emotions as purposefully as he controlled his. Based on this evaluation, he made his decision.

Chapel stood staring at the floor as Spock raised his hand to her face. Her head jerked up when she felt his touch and then she closed her eyes. She knew the significance of the hand position. *Maybe this way he'll understand the impossibility*

of the whole thing, she thought with a sigh of resignation.

Her mind was not unfamiliar to him. The experience with Sargon and the contact of the previous night allowed him to join quickly. Carefully shielding his thoughts, Spock cautiously deepened the meld. She offered no resistance to the probe, almost welcoming the opportunity to let him know her feelings without the embarrassment of having to speak them aloud.

After several minutes he broke the meld as gently as he had initiated it. Chapel opened her eyes and stepped back, increasing the distance between them physically as well as mentally. She felt emotionally drained and physically tired, but strangely calm. Now that he knew, surely he would agree that any permanent relationship between them was out of the question.

"Your reasons for refusing me are not logical. They are based on emotional misconceptions."

"Emotional, yes. But misconceptions, no. The majority of the beings in this galaxy are not ruled by logic. And to them and to me, my reasons are valid."

"Christine ...."

"I love you; if I didn't I could do what you ask. But, because I do love you I can say no, because I know it's the best thing for both of us. You can't convince me that a relationship between us wouldn't be a disaster."

She walked to the door of his office and paused. During that moment Spock thought she might have changed her mind, but her voice reflected no doubt in her decision. "Goodnight, Spock."

The halls were empty as she made her way back to her quarters. As she returned to her room for the first time since leaving early that morning, the tears that had threatened ever since she left Spock's office now cascaded down her face. Chapel had honestly believed that she had come to terms with her past, but her reaction to the memories surfaced by the meld proved that wasn't true. Looking in the mirror, she addressed her image, "A freshman psychology student could see that." As she undressed, she tried to evaluate her present responses to the insight she gained through the meld. She forced herself to reexamine her behavior objectively. Chris had always prided herself on facing facts, even the unpleasant ones.

For the first time, she seriously looked at the way she handled male/female relationships. Using the tie-in from her quarters to the computer in the lab, Chapel used the medical codes to call up her p-data. Although technically she should not have access to this level of medical records, McCoy had found it easier to "give" her his code than to always have to find the data himself. ("After all, Chris, research may be your favorite thing, but it's not mine.")

Her scores on the file were no surprise, especially since she knew the childhood traumas they reflected. Chapel's earliest memories were feelings of cold, hunger, and pain. Later memories were more visual, involving beatings, locked doors, and run-down buildings near spaceports that all looked the same. Even in the supposed "equality-for-all" Federation, it wasn't easy being a bastard. It wasn't until her mother's death (at the hands of a dissatisfied customer) and her placement in a childcare facility that the memories became less grim.

The combination had produced, according to the Federation standard personality profile test, a highly intelligent ("Thank you."), but slightly cynical persona ("So, who wants to be perfect?"). This, said the report, was reflected in the flippant sense of humor, a proclivity for disciplined independent work, a high empathic/sympathic response to the sick and injured, and a deep-set skepticism about personal relationships, specifically heterosexual ones.

"And, what else?" *Talking to a computer screen is a bad habit,* she thought as she entered the codes necessary for a more complete psych-readout. The breakdown continued along the same lines. After reading for several minutes, Chapel leaned back and looked at the screen, then input a scenario and asked for an analysis. "Well, at least I'm predictable to the computer."

Addressing the terminal once again, "This is certainly reassuring; according to

you the only reason I love Spock is because I thought it would always be one-sided. According to you the only reason I became engaged to Roger was because I wanted a father-figure. According to you I've got sexual hang-ups. And I'm ... yelling at a computer."

Chapel got up and crossed the room to sit on the edge of her bed. Cupping her face in her hands, she discovered her tension had developed into a full-fledged headache. *There ought to be a law against self-analysis,* she thought as the pain seemed to center behind her eyes. *Okay, think. Could the relationship with Roger been more father/daughter than lover? Yes, it could. You didn't spend very much time doing things lovers do, such as sex. You can count on the fingers of one hand all the times you were together in bed. And it certainly wasn't anything like last night.*

In fact, there has never been a time like last night, Chapel admitted to herself. Last night's sex had been different. Never before in her somewhat limited experience had she actually enjoyed the experience.

"Which, according to your analysis, I'm not able to do," she said as she walked over to the terminal. "If you're wrong about that, then you could be wrong about a lot of other things. With perhaps more force than necessary, she dumped the data and exited the file.

Acting on impulse, for the first time she could remember, Chapel decided to go see Spock. She quickly redressed in her uniform, almost as if she was afraid if she waited she would change her mind.

Whatever happens, I'll know I tried. Determinedly, Chapel approached Spock's quarters and knocked on the door.

"Enter."

The door slid open and she stepped inside. Spock had been meditating and was standing close to the firepot. As Chapel crossed the room to stand in front of him, the uneven rhythm of her heartbeat was loud in her ears. He didn't speak as she looked into his face trying to find even a small shadow of expression. "I'd like to apologize for my behavior earlier this evening."

There was absolutely no emotion in his voice as Spock expressed his standard "apologies are not logical" viewpoint.

Dropping her eyes under the intensity of his gaze, she spoke softly, "It is necessary for me, Spock. I had no right to say what I did. I sounded like some sort of 'holier-than-thou prig,' a Dunsell." Taking a deep breath, Chapel raised her eyes to meet his once again.

Although there was no apparent difference in his expression, his demeanor seemed much more approachable. "I think we both made the same mistake: I decided based on my views that we shouldn't have a relationship and you decided based on your views we should. This isn't a subject that can be decided on an individual basis."

"How, then, do you propose we decide the matter?"

"Well, I was pretty vocal on my viewpoints earlier. Maybe you should try and convince me."

Spock's fingers reached out to stroke the line of her throat, tracing feather-light designs on her skin. "Are you inviting me to have intercourse with you?" His fingers paused on the shallow hollow at the base of her neck, finding her pulse throbbing beneath her pale skin. In the soft glow of the firepot his features seemed to be carved from burnished metal. It was only the deep, steady rhythm of his breathing that kept him from appearing to be a green-bronze statue.

Taking a deep breath, she shifted towards him, blushing as she answered him, "Yes, I rather think I am." Hesitantly, she touched the triangle of skin revealed at the collar of his tunic. She watched his eyes, not knowing what to expect.

"Think, Christine?" Spock reached around to the back of her head to free her hair from its confining coil. As it tumbled past her shoulders, he gathered her close against his body and buried his face in her hair.

She answered his questions with a supple movement of her body that was a slow twisting pressure against the center of his desire.

Gently, delicately, his mind touched hers, finding a sense of apprehension. Gradually Spock allowed the meld to deepen, realizing that the mental contact of the previous night had left her with a confusing set of joint remembrances.

Memory and expectation gave way to reality as she savored the feel of him. Her palms slid down the contours of his back and found the taught shape of hips. Spock responded by tugging her even tighter against him. She responded to the demanding sensuality of his lips and tongue by arching closer to him.

With a swift, economical movement he released the clasp at the neck of her uniform and pulled the fastener down her back with one tug, deepening his kiss as he did so. The heat of his hands warmed her skin as he eased the clothing off her shoulders. Spock gently shifted her away from him as he pulled the uniform down her body until it fell, pooling on the floor about her feet. Her only undergarment, other than the regulation hose, was a lavender and lace (decidedly non-regulation) slip that skimmed her body. Her white skin glowed with a pearly luster against the fragile lingerie. Spock's dark eyes flowed over her, stopping on the thrust of her nipples, evident beneath the sheer fabric. Even as she felt a blush climbing her face, she could also feel the pleasure the depth of her response gave him.

Encouraged by this, her hands moved slowly over his body, loosening the ties and fastenings of his clothing. Her lips replaced her hands as the garments fell from his body, absorbed in the taste and scent of him, discovering and enjoying his masculine essence. Her lips and tongue were cool on his body as they followed the paths of her hands. Her mouth traced the ridges of muscle on his stomach and her tongue carressed downward. Spock felt a surge of desire as his pleasure filled her mind. Christine's kiss lingered over the source of that shared feeling, not wanting it to end. Spock's hand tangled in her hair, pulling her head back. He looked down into her eyes, heavy-lidded with passion. His body tightened as he raised her to stand within the circle of his arms.

All barriers fell and coherent thought paled beneath the consuming sensation of lips, skin and hands. She felt herself lifted, carried easily as Spock turned toward his bed. She turned her face into his neck, breathing in the musky scent. He set Chris on the bed, his hands framing her face tenderly as he kissed her deeply. Her fingers locked in his hair as the combined passion whirled in their minds.

Spock's hands were reaching to push the remaining clothing from her body. Soon his hand was resting on her bare flesh like a burning promise. He was not a passive partner, although she seemed to sense he was restraining himself, allowing her to set the pace. Laying side by side, Spock matched her touch for touch, caress for caress. Until suddenly he caught his breath harshly, held her to him fiercely for a moment, and then twisted to place her beneath him.

It was as though flames were ignited in her mind at his touch, a hint of something leaping out at her through the meld, something burning its way deeply into her consciousness. Her eyes widened at the shock of being known so totally. But before there was time to contemplate or explore the feeling, it was submerged in an onslaught of tactile sensation.

His mouth on hers smothered the strident cries of pleasure that were echoed in her mind as his body thrust into hers. She arched, lost in a spiral of heated passion. It was as though she called to him and he to her as they came together in a moment of total sensuality. Afterward, Spock held her, unfamiliar with these feelings and the realization of the completeness of the joining. In spite of the previous night's experience, neither of them had been prepared for the intensity of the meld.

★

"Christine." Spock deliberately thinned the mental connection, allowing only the tenacious thread of the bond to remain. The creation of a bond was totally unexpected, not knowing a bond could be established without willing participation of both parties. He had anticipated that a Vulcan healer would be necessary to forge

the joining, since Christine was not telepathic.

"Yes." It seemed strange to speak; only a few minutes ago it was as though her thoughts were his and his, hers. She had felt almost like a part of him and now there was just this nagging feeling like the beginning of a headache but without the pain.

"There are formalities that are necessary."

Christine raised her head from his chest and propped up on her elbow. Looking at him, she felt a slight stir of panic; he was still asking for a commitment. "Not everyone gets married, Spock. Sometimes people just stay together for a while to ... make sure it's what they want."

"Are you suggesting 'staying together for a while' as a possible alternative?"

She shifted away from him, moving closer to the edge of the bed. Suddenly she became very conscious of her nudity. "It was just a thought. What if we're not compatible, or it doesn't work out?"

Spock reached out and effectively stopped her exodus from the bed. "Christine, I have considered this matter. Although your behavior over the last 23.85 hours has been unexpected, I see no need to change the original proposal."

The strain of those past 23.85 hours was starting to show as Chris lifted her hand to stifle a yawn. Whatever she had planned to say in reply was lost as another followed the first. She was so tired.

Gently he pulled her down to again lay next to him. Sensing her uncertainty, he sent waves of contentment through the slender bond. "Rest; we will talk again in the morning."

"Here?"

"Here." Humans, after all, were creatures of habit; if he permitted a pattern to develop it could make the coming arrangements appear commonplace. "Sleep, Christine."

She was surprised at how comfortable it was to be next to him. And she was so very tired. In the morning she'd make him understand that a trial period would be a good idea. Then he could see how impossible the entire marriage idea was and, most important, he could gracefully get out of the situation. She was almost certain that Vulcans never got divorced. If it was logical to marry someone, then how could it become logical not to be married. Her thoughts continued to wander as sleep quickly claimed her.

Spock watched as her breathing slowed and she pressed closer to him. Her words and actions made it quite apparent that she did not recognize the bond. This entire bonding was unplanned, but it was done. Even now he could feel it being strengthened simply by her presence.

His arms tightened around her, the coolness of her body pleasant as it pressed against his. In the morning he would concisely present all the reasons why they were suited. Christine was a very intelligent woman; she would recognize that joining was the logical alternative.

Genesis

Light against darkest void
is formed from silent hope
Mute love sustains me

-- Ellen Hulley

vulcan dreams

by Kyle Eric Stuart

The Vulcan science officer lazily rolled over onto his side. He closed his eyes, attempting to block out the night sounds of the ship. Vainly he tried to meditate himself to sleep using the basic Vulcan technique. With a tired yawn he felt himself slowly drifting as his mind reviewed the events of the day.

When sleep would not yield to the problems of his day he turned over onto his back and stared up at the grey ceiling. So much had occured recently, and none of it within the realm of logic. *Then again, their own mission was hardly logical,* he thought with a slight smile.

Who would think that the Federation would have felt it necessary to send a military craft into Earth's distant past. Would it not have been better to simply research the historical archives rather than risk hundreds of lives in such a mission? Not only were the lives of the crew in jeopardy, but Earth's entire future was at stake. One wrong move by any of them and Earth as they knew it would cease to exist. Some bureaucrat, most likely Human, had felt a need to test the theory of the slingshot effect and the *Enterprise* was deemed the ship most capable of completing the task. Little did anyone suspect how Earth's past would greet them.

From somewhere in the darkness his reverie was distracted by the faint sound of padded paws. He felt the weight of the small animal as it jumped onto the foot of his bed, moving slowly over the single cover. Then in an almost comforting act, the furred creature lay alongside him, its head resting on his shoulder. With a subconscious move he began to lightly scratch the feline behind a dark ear. As if soothed by his touch, the clawed paws began to flex, a low, purring cadence matching his strokes.

This dark creature seemed as intriguing as her owner. Through the dim lighting of his cabin he watched the cat as he mentally reviewed the facts. He wondered if all that Gary Seven had stated was correct. Could it be possible that a civilization of such high intelligence could exist in their universe without being discovered by them? More importantly, why would a supposedly intelligent man choose such a creature as a traveling companion? True, the dark feline did have a calming quality about her, but was this the only reason that Seven protected the creature with his very life?

With this thought he began to delve further into his memory of Earth's history. No UFO sightings or any other strange occurrence was ever recorded in this timespan, yet here they were. Both the *Enterprise* and Gary Seven's presence meant that something was not in synch with the established time frame. And it was Spock's job to work out the puzzle and provide answers for his captain.

When his temples began to throb he pushed the problem aside. *Nothing will be accomplished in this state,* he told himself, calling upon mental disciplines to dissolve the pain of an oncoming headache. From near his shouler he felt the lightness of the cat's head draped over his arm. As the softly purring cadence lulled him to sleep, he was aware of the warmth which radiated from the creature. Like a protective shield, the combination cast a calming aura around his troubled thoughts.

Filled with serenity, he seemed to be lifted on a light cloud of dreams. He felt at peace in the pleasant dreams of fatigue. He dreamt of times on Earth. He took pleasure in the cool summer breeze of Terra and was delighted when his dreams took him to the crest of Vulcan's Forge. A sudden tranquility overcame him, and he was at peace with himself and his dual heritage -- a serenity which neither race was able to steal, or erase from his inner soul.

As this thought came to mind he became aware of a cool sensation, a gentle nipping moving along his chest and down his abdomen. With the sensations crossing into his dreams his mind began to take him to another place, one where he had been only a few months ago.

It was on Omicron Ceti III where he had allowed his defenses to weaken. Under the shade of an autumnal tree he felt a light breeze move across him as her hands worked the fastening of his jumpsuit. With the garment opened, she began to draw slow circles through the hair on his chest. With blue eyes the shade of a Terran sea she smiled down at him, a soft glow of sunshine lighting her golden hair. With a tilt of her head she gazed down mischievously before lowering her head.

He gasped at the exquisite sensation of her moist lips on his nipple. The tingling reaction seemed to charge every sense in his body until he was left begging for release. When he felt his breath quicken, he groaned as his eyes suddenly snapped open.

"Leila," he heard his own voice whisper in the darkness of his cabin.

When his eyes focused and reality returned, he realized he had been dreaming, but something was not right. Startled that the sensations were still coursing through his body, he snapped to attention and called the lights in his cabin to full intensity. Still on his back but now fully awake, he glanced down at the lithe form before him.

With hazel eyes and dark hair, she smiled seductively. Clad in a single garment of black silk, her ivory-smooth skin seemed to beckon his touch. Like an intoxicating drug, she swept him further into a state of arousal. With meticulous care she swirled her satiny tongue over his chest. Despite his inner caution, he felt himself being pulled deeper under her spell. Throwing his head back against the pillow, a gasp escaped his control as her hand began to trace his excited member through the fabric of his nightclothes.

As if suddenly aware of the situation, he drew on Vulcan control over his senses and held her at bay with a firm grip on her wrists. Although his movements were abrupt, she showed no fear. In fact, she seemed to expect this reaction from him. With a smile she watched and waited.

"Who are you?" he questioned in a whisper. Mute, she merely relaxed in his grasp. For an irrational moment he wondered if she was a new crewmember assigned aboard at the last starbase, but one look at her and he knew she was not.

"You are not one of our crew. Who are you? Where do you come from?" he questioned once more as he sat up in bed. Why he did not simply call Security he could not answer. Instead he held her small wrist with one hand as he reached for her temple.

He stopped, that hand frozen in midair, aghast at the realization that he was about to invade the privacy of a sentient mind without the owner's permission. Even as the thought coalesced in his own mind, he saw understanding and approval flicker in her eyes.

Determination strengthened by this acceptance, he used the techniques of his people to reach into her mind. Delving deep into her subconsciousness, he was greeted with a fire so powerful and all-consuming, flames that lapped and licked at the very core of his existence. Like a man trapped in a spider's web he felt himself being smothered by her inner resolve. With a sudden and intense fear he began to retreat from her essence. He understood her fiery passion and knew that it was not unlike the flame of his own people, when once every seven years they

were pulled into such a vortex of insanity. Like his own people, she was being consumed by an inner torment worse than any death could threaten.

With a sigh of understanding, he nodded in wordless reply. He understood her pain, and he knew what was needed to relieve her anguish. In silence she looked up at him, her only movement a twisting of unease from her captured wrists. At her sign of discomfort he released her from his grasp and awaited her next move.

Rather than bolting for the door as he would have expected, she moved her slender hands to the fastening at his waist. With long, pearl-colored nails she untied the single fastening that held his pants closed. Somewhat in pity, but also because of his excited state, he did not stop her actions. Instead he allowed the sensations of her touch to wash over him. A skilled explorer, she aroused him shamelessly.

She pulled at the fabric of his pants garment until it slid over his slender hips. With a smile filled with pleasure she tugged and pulled at the cloth as it slipped past his legs and fell heedlessly to the floor. Then, in a move of calculated ease she turned her attention to his freed organ.

Filled with confidence, she took his engorged member in hand and manipulated it to further arousal. Rising to attention, it stood proudly at her slightest touch. Splayed on his back, he began to moan uncontrollably at her gentle touches. The feel of her sharp nails against his testes nearly sent him over the brink of control. With a moan, he grabbed her hands and held her still until he regained a measure of control.

"I understand, but ..." he faltered as he tried to explain his own fear of inadequacy. As if comprehending she smiled as she pulled free of his grip. With a singular confidence she returned to her ministrations. Entranced once more, he allowed her touches to wash over him.

As if drowning in a sea of pleasure he felt his heart rate increase as his moans of ecstacy grew in volume. At the moist touch of her lips on his organ he involuntarily arched upward in uncontrollable pleasure. With skilled ease she bathed him from head to base until he began to beg her to stop, to continue, to grant him mercy, any mercy. Instead she pulled away, but only long enough to shed her own garments.

In the brightly lit room he absorbed the full view of her shape. He marveled at her perfection; so smooth yet firm, she was the very image of feminine beauty. As she moved to straddle him he caught her poignant odor of musk, sharp yet not unpleasant as it wafted past his senses.

Like an animal deep in rutting cycle she hurriedly maneuvered herself over him, then with unexpected speed she sank onto his throbbing organ. Startled by her sudden move, he moaned as her intense heat surrounded him. When her rocking motions began he settled himself back into the mattress and allowed his own upward movements to begin.

Deep in concentration, she hovered over him with eyes closed against the light. He could feel her need, for her need was now within him. As if pulled into an early Pon Farr, he moved with an intensity he had never before felt. But this time was different from his last cycle, when there had been only the need and utter pain. Now there was only desire. In the flurry of their movements he reached to her for a meld. Still preoccupied with satiating her needs, she did not impede his actions. She continued to pound down on him as his fingers moved toward the melding points, and held his face in her hands as if to strengthen the link.

Even as their bodies merged, their minds became one. Her inner fire and pain became his, and her fear was his. With firm control he eased her discomfort, taking her pain into himself while his body quenched her inner fires. Then when the unbearable pain lessened he began to inch deeper into her mind. Careful of his actions, he entered the darkness of her mind and opened himself to her. Like newly acquainted friends, they raveled slowly into each other's thoughts. He could feel her intrigue and pleasure as she crossed the first arena of his mind.

Like a well-kept room he stored each thought, each memory in a neatly ordered space. His logical thinking and Vulcan upbringing were her first encounters. Then in a bolder move she entered the lower levels of his mind. She sensed more than saw his inner insecurities and fear, and she felt his pain. As if born of tears and sorrow she saw each pain of rejection, each rejection leading him deeper into a corner of darkness.

With a sudden tenderness she wrapped her spirit around him in a protective cocoon. As the feel of her body on his penetrated his senses she held open her mind to him, allowing him to see her inner being, and let him see her home world.

Much as his organ buried deep in her warmth, he saw a structure rising high into the purple haze of the alien sky. Sparkling like a crystal tower, it gleamed against a backdrop of similar structures. Then she took him to a place far below the crystal buildings.

Down at ground level was where her people dwelt. Since the beginning of time itself her people had existed on this planet, they and their life energy always kept in seclusion. Even when the Strangers from beyond arrived, they remained unseen, and unseen by the new inhabitants her people watched with wonder as the Strangers set up their strange equipment. But after a time, they were discovered and invited to join the organization of Strangers. From then on her people and the Strangers coexisted in a world built on the forces of their energy and the higher intelligence of the Strangers. A few, such as she, were trained to work with the Strangers, and even though they frequently traveled from their planet, once home they rarely left the safe haven of their hidden city.

Shapeshifters. The word itself held little meaning to her, but she knew that it was a term used by the planet's inhabitants. She and her people were a race capable of changing shape at will. With the aid of their telepathic powers they were able to identify and manifest themselves into whatever shape they read from the minds of outsiders.

He did not see her true form as any one specific shape or image. Instead he saw the bright, incandescent glow of her energy. As she showed him the true image of her being, he saw her as a bright and beautiful mass of energy. And he felt, more than saw, the tenderness and open caring that was an intricate part of her existence. Despite this inner beauty she, like her people, never revealed her true shape to outsiders, not even to the Strangers. Only behind the protection of their city walls were they free to move about in the shape of their birth. With this knowledge came an intense respect for her and her people. As this shared thought crossed her mind he felt her smile, and then she took him to the day when she had joined the Stranger Gary Seven.

Since birth she had been trained to assist the outsiders. Like her mother before her, she journeyed beyond their walls to outworlds. With an inner energy known only to their people she took the shape of the mind closest to her. Then with her extensive training she could help the outsiders in maintaining stability in the universe.

Though she had gone on many such travels, she feared this next journey. She could not have stated her concern at the time, but later she would learn the cause. Like a plague suddenly rearing its ugly face, her system began the change. She found it increasingly difficult to maintain the desired shape of the creature. The trembling, burning fever of her need was growing with increased strength. Racked with fear, her mind reviewed the situation.

This mission was necessary; without it a sister star and its inhabitants would be ceased. She could not fail in this endeavor, thus she could not return to her planet to take a mate.

An image of fire and flames rapidly surrounded his senses. Then in the midst of this heat he saw her lithe, dark form. Kneeling before the image of Isis, she held up a sacrifice to an unknown deity. As if aware of his presence, she showed him her plan.

She knew that he was to be her chosen. Out of all the beings on this ship, only he seemed capable of fulfilling her rutting cycle. Alien to her, yet somehow posessed of the same telepathic abilities, he would be the ideal choice, and his Vulcan stamina would be adequate for the prolonged movements which she would need. Then she showed him the satisfaction received when he first entered her inner warmth. Like the cool crystal springs of her home world, his very being sent a soothing sensation through her. More importantly, his precise movements added pleasure to her pain. Like two pieces of a puzzle, he filled her completely.

Still locked in a meld, their bodies moved even as their minds merged. Then when he saw her essence suddenly flare with an intense light, he shoved deeply into her as his seed shot upward. He envisioned his liquid heat searing the very depth of her inner core. Like a bolt of lightning flashing outward, the mark was found. With a shrill cry her essence glowed brightly for an eternity of a second, then she was silent.

Panting and moist from their exertion, they lay wrapped in one another's arms. He felt as if it had all been a dream, but a pleasant dream that left him fully sated. When he finally regained his senses he found himself covered by her body. Still buried within her, he allowed a calmness to overcome him as he lightly stroked her hair. Soft and silky to his touch, he idly wondered if this was a form she saw in his mind, or whether it was a form she chose. As if hearing his thought, she began to nibble lightly on his ear lobe as her inner muscles contracted around him.

Gently, she left light nips along his neck as she teased him back to life. Although fatigued, he felt pleasure in her movements. He knew and understood what was needed of him, and although her rutting cycle would not be as long as that of a Vulcan, it would be consistent.

As he felt the excitement build, he sensed her emotions. No longer in pain, she was now able to move with slow, precise movements. With meticulous ease she worked her magic over his buried member. Although he could sense the need still in her, the hurried, life-threatening mating cycle had now waned to a gentle pace.

At this thought he gently rolled her over onto her back. Overwhelmed by his size, she relaxed and allowed him to thrust unimpeded into her depths. Even as he drove himself into her, he felt her gathering unused strength. He did not know how long he could maintain this pace, but he knew that he would make an honest attempt to sate the mating cycle which threatened to consume her very existence.

★

"What do you make of the cat, Mr. Spock?" asked the captain from across the conference table.

Holding the purring feline in his arms, he continued to stroke its soft black fur. Just as the night before, she moved against him in deep satisfaction. With the shared meld had come understanding of her race. She showed him the true essence of her existence and although they would never see one another again, he knew that she would be well. Comforted in this knowledge, he inhaled silently as he scratched behind a furred ear. He caught a slight glimmer in her green eyes and almost smiled.

He was able to stop his smile in time to notice the others gathered around the table. Although her plan was never made clear to him, he knew that she and Gary Seven meant no harm. By the same token, he could not voice this opinion without revealing his nocturnal experience. Realizing that the captain still awaited an answer, he looked up from the cat as he swiveled his chair to face his friend.

"Quite a lovely animal, Captain; I find myself strangely drawn to it," he responded truthfully as the memories of the night before returned. Such a passion-filled night he would never again experience, yet he felt no remorse. Instead, he felt pleased and honored that she had chosen him to be the one to satisfy her mating cycle, if only for this one time.

With a slight upturn of lips he gazed down at the shapeshifter as he continued to stoke its silky black fur. As if in agreement with his thoughts, the deep green eyes sparkled in knowing amusement as a low purr reached his acute hearing.

CADEAU

by Janis E. Laine

CAPTAIN'S LOG - Stardate 6583.4: "We are in orbit around Canis Minor IV, for which preliminary studies indicate that a high degree of civilization once flourished -- a civilization now long extinct. Our mission here is a dual one: re-supply and render any needed assistance to the archaeological survey team now doing research here, and rendezvous with First Officer Spock, returning from detached service."

Despite the primitive conditions, Canis Minor IV was deemed acceptable for shore leave for those who so desired -- which a surprising number of the crew did. As a result, the usual assortment of sprains, blisters, and broken bones required medical attention. There were even a few hang-overs, to no one's real astonishment. Dr. McCoy tended to them all with his usual ascerbic comments, and managed to run the required routine physical on the archaeological team as well. Only one failed to pass.

Jillia D'aarvon met Dr. McCoy's gaze and said, "I thought as much. I knew the break hadn't healed properly. But this doesn't incapacitate me, and you know how difficult it is for me to travel with -- others ...."

"I know," McCoy said kindly. "But the longer you wait to get that bone regrown, the longer the regeneration process is going to take. Don't worry, we've dealt with circumstances like yours before. There may be a few sticky situations at first, but all will have settled down long before we reach Starbase 10. You'd enjoy a little vacation, wouldn't you? A chance to get away from all that dust and potsherds?"

"Well ...."

"Look. I promise you I'll take care of everything. I'll speak to the captain and I'm sure he'll agree. You go on back to the surface and collect your gear. We have to wait on a carrier-shuttle from Chronos II, but there's no reason you can't get settled in while we're waiting."

"Not to mention enjoying the luxury of a water-fresher!" Jillia sighed. "Perhaps you're right, Doctor. I'll do as you suggest."

★

The sparkle of the transporter beam gave way to the form and substance of the ship's first officer, Spock. The Vulcan stepped from the platform with a weary sigh. *It is good to be home,* he thought.

---

* cadeau - (kədō′), n. Obs.
Old Earth Fr.: boon, sacrifice, gift

Although born on Vulcan, for many years he had not considered that planet, or any other, to be home. Inhaling deeply, Spock identified a number of faint, familiar scents -- ozone from the transporter, food, the odor of human and humanoid inhabitants -- all these combined to produce a certain indefinable something that was the essence of the Enterprise. *This is home,* he mused.

He waved away the crewman who had stepped forward to take Spock's duffle and tiredly shouldered the bulky item. Then he turned to meet the warm eyes and restrained greeting of his commanding officer, Captain James T. Kirk. *Yes,* Spock thought. *Now I am home.*

Exhausted from the arduous nature of his off-ship assignment and from the long shuttle journey, Spock sorely needed the oblivion of the Vulcan sleep-trance. Following a short debriefing with Kirk, Spock sought the solitude of his quarters. Kirk issued an order that he not be disturbed with anything less critical than total galactic war.

Neither the arrival of a passenger nor warping out of orbit were matters of significant import. Routine gradually re-established itself and the great ship made her graceful way toward Starbase 10.

★

Spock emerged from the sleep-trance with a raging appetite. He had lost nearly two kilos from a frame that did not have two kilos to spare, and still looked gaunt and tired. The Vulcan ordered broth from the food-synthesizer in his cabin and sipped it as he dressed. Then he made his way to the cafeteria to obtain a more substantial meal.

He carried his tray to the isolated alcove which was generally left to higher-ranking officers and visiting VIP's. He did not at first notice that he was not alone. Rather, gradually he became aware of a certain internal agitation, which he attributed to insufficient rest. Then the soft clatter of utensil against plate drew his attention to the shadowy dimness at the end of the alcove. He nodded politely to the woman seated there, then looked away, feeling that he had somehow invaded her privacy.

Though he did not recognize her, there seemed to be something somehow familiar about her. In the brief glimpse she seemed small and rounded. Plump, he decided, was the most accurate adjective. She wore a simple jumpsuit rather than a uniform, and long hair braided and bound round her head.

He could not pinpoint exactly what it was about her that disturbed him. Spock was becoming decidedly restless and his appetite had fled. Spock pushed distractedly at his salad with a fork until he heard the woman getting up to leave. He did not look up as she passed, but intently studied her departing back. Moments later she had ceased to matter, for Kirk, then Scott, found and joined him, the diversion driving the enigma of the woman from his thoughts.

He found her next in a quiet corner of the rec deck, working at a drafting table. Approaching, Spock was once again struck by the odd feeling of restlessness that nagged at him. He tried to ignore it as he observed her. She was working on a drawing of a building, flipping back and forth through a sketchbook to check details. Recognizing the structure as one on Canis Minor IV, Spock concluded that she had come aboard there and most probably was a member of the survey team assigned to that planet. With the slow, cautious tread of a stalking panther, Spock moved forward to speak to her.

★

"... they felt, for example, that giving a gift, any sort of an offering, was the epitomy of philanthropy. One's standing in the community was determined by one's generosity. Everywhere we probed, we found their motto." Jillia flipped to a page where a series of alien characters were copied in a precise script. "It translates as, 'to give unconditionally is to receive thricefold'."

"Interesting," Spock agreed. "Not unlike the Potlatch Indians of Old Earth."

"Exactly!" Jillia's eyes sparkled. They had been talking for nearly an hour; there was nothing she had mentioned that the Vulcan had been uninformed about or unwilling to discuss. After five days of self-imposed isolation, it was almost the same as being with one of her dig team again.

And despite the uneasiness she generated within him, Spock found her presence somehow pleasurable. Her voice was deep for a woman and well modulated. Her speech settled softly on Vulcan ears. The babble of voices from the rest of the rec deck faded away as Spock concentrated on Jillia's words. He felt he could listen to her speak for hours without tiring of the experience.

"... they had a remarkable culture. And except for that one idiosyncracy, their social system seems not dissimilar to what I have read of Vulcan's. But I must confess to an embarrassing lack of knowledge about your home planet. Perhaps you would help fill in some of the gaps, Mr. Spock?"

"I shall be happy to answer any of your questions that I can," Spock replied.

Jillia could not repress a tiny smile. "Maybe you would prefer to wait until you know the nature of my questions before agreeing so readily. Some of them relate to biology. I understand Vulcans do not ordinarily care to discuss that subject."

Realizing he had been neatly maneuvered, Spock was tempted to retreat. But he was curious, too, as to what the woman had in mind.

"Your understanding is correct," he said at last. "But for the sake of scientific clarification, I would make the effort."

"That is most gracious of you," Jillia said. "Would you care to set a time?"

"I am to be relieved from the bridge at 2400 hours. If that is not too late, you may join me in my quarters at any time after that."

"Thank you, Commander. That is an ideal time. It will give me a chance to transcribe some field notes and review the questions I will be asking you." She carefully rolled up the parchment on which she had been working and put away her ink brushes. As she rose from the drafting table, Spock moved to stand as well. Jillia raised a dainty, short-nailed hand and gestured for him to remain seated. "Until midnight, Mr. Spock," she said, and moved purposefully away across the rec deck toward the turbolifts.

"That is some woman!" Dr. McCoy had appeared soundlessly at Spock's side. The Vulcan was shaken by the doctor's sudden presence but would not have permitted it to show to save himself from the auto-da-fé.

"Indeed, Doctor," he said calmly. "She seems quite knowledgeable."

"That's not what I meant." McCoy was bouncing on his toes as a mischievous gleam danced in his eye. "That's the kind of lady," he drawled, "who ought to be wearin' silks and crinolines -- or nothin' at all."

"She seemed quite properly clothed to me. Garments such as you suggest would prove quite cumbersome at an archaeological dig. And none at all could result in a rather nasty sunburn." Spock raised an eyebrow in McCoy's direction, silently daring him to continue the match. McCoy accepted the dare.

"In which case," he returned, "it would be my pleasant duty to treat that sunburn. And I know just the remedy."

"In that unlikely event," said Spock, who had had enough and was coming to his feet, "one could only hope that you would remember and adhere to the oaths and ethics of your profession, primitive as it may be. Good day, Doctor."

★

Before assuming his station on the bridge, Spock retired to his quarters to subject himself to a strict mental self-screening. He was totally nonplussed by his reaction to Jillia. Normally immune to the sharpest of feminine wiles, he found himself increasingly drawn to her.

She was hardly a coquette. She dressed simply and did not rely on cosmetics to

enhance the colors of her skin and eyes. Although her hair was long, she wore it in a severe style to keep it out of the way of her hands, hands that seemed always to be filled with delicate instruments for unraveling the mysteries of the past or wielding ink brushes with the skill of a master limner.

She produced not only detailed drawings of the ancient civilizations that she studied, but extraordinary portraits of how their inhabitants might have appeared. After examining some of her sketches, Spock surmised that she might be calling upon a form of telepathic talent. Retro-cognition was used by many successful archaeologists, consciously or unconsciously, to locate potentially significant historical sites. The topic was one he intended to ask her about during their conference. None of which, of course, explained his peculiar interest in her. He had encountered equally knowledgeable women before and had not been so troubled.

And the reaction was getting worse. His mind was being assaulted by unbidden thoughts, and more. Images of incredible clarity focusing on Jillian pervaded his mind to the exclusion of nearly all else. An incapacitated first officer was worse than none at all; a deranged one could be fatal. Thoughts and images such as he had been experiencing had no place in the disciplined mind of a Vulcan. Was he losing his senses? Spock shuddered slightly.

But he could detect no irregularity in his physiology. There were no indications of the onset of the mating time. And the "aberration" had lessened somewhat following his meditation, though he still felt extremely vulnerable. Retreating deep behind his Vulcan training, Spock took his place on the bridge.

His was a quiet watch, for which he was thankful. The desultory conversation that flowed over and around him was only a mild irritant and a familiar one. An all-Vulcan crew would never have wasted the energy, but then he had not wanted to be part of an all-Vulcan crew.

★

Relieved from his post at precisely 2400 hours, Spock made his way through the dimly lighted, deserted corridors of Officers' Territory. He was thankful he had set the time of the meeting for that late hour. Despite the scientific nature, Spock's innate sense of privacy dictated that the fewer who knew of their conference, the better.

Reaching the seclusion of his quarters, Spock set about preparing himself for what he now thought of only as an ordeal to be gotten through as quickly and as clinically as possible. He could not now conceive of why he had ever agreed to meet privately with Jillia at all, especially considering the topic she wanted to discuss. But since he had committed himself, it would have been a breach of good manners to cancel without a good reason. He welcomed anything short of a holing of the ship's hull that would have provided that good excuse.

Stripping quickly, Spock stepped into the cubicle housing the water-fresher, setting the subliminals for something soothing and Vulcan. Minutes later, he knew it wasn't going to help.

Finished, he programmed the fabricator for the long black cassock he favored when off duty. From a storage bin in the bulkhead he selected one of the finely woven, fold-and-tuck Vulcan undergarments which he prefered to Federation issue. He had just finished arranging the folds of the cassock when the door signal bleeped. Only Spock's iron discipline kept him from starting violently.

Unthinking, he spoke in Vulcan: "K'vath!" Enter. Understanding the tone if not the word, Jillia stepped into the red-hued cabin. "You are welcomed," Spock said with far more courtesy than he felt. "Please, be seated."

"Thank you. May I examine your collection first?" Jillia had started toward the weapon wall, drawn by the ancient artifacts. She paused at his words, not wishing to trespass or perhaps violate some taboo. But Spock was pleased by her interest, and gestured his consent.

While Jillia studied the old weapons, Spock studied her. His earlier reluc-

tance to speak with her was rapidly melting away, and that puzzled him even more than his original agreement did.

Her clothing was a startling change. She had replaced the jumpsuit with a gown of swirled rose and gray, gleaming with fine golden embroidery. A brooch-clasp of some ancient origin secured a single strap over one shoulder. The fabric followed her every motion, and she moved with a gracefulness he had not truly appreciated until now. Nothing marred the flowing lines of the garment; Spock surmised there was nothing beneath it but Jillia.

Her hair had been pulled high on her head with a silken cord and left to tumble in a golden cascade down her back. Spock found himself wanting to plunge his fingers into it, lift it, spread it over her bare shoulders -- mentally he shook himself and forced his mind to recall what it was she had just asked him.

Jillia had discovered his lyre and had asked over her shoulder if he played. Spock nodded.

"Mr. Spock, would you ....?"

The distraction would give him a last chance to analyze what was happening. Spock lifted the instrument and carried it to a stool behind the computer console. His fingers touched the adjustments and then the strings with the delicacy of a man caressing his lover, his face seeming to take on the same rapt countenance. But when the haunting melody ended, the Vulcan was no closer to a satisfactory solution than when he had begun playing.

"That was lovely," Jillia said softly. "Thank you for sharing it with me."

Spock inclined his head again in a blend of bow and acknowledgement. Then he straightened and seemed to draw into himself. In a tone of studied reserve he said, "You may ask your questions now, if you wish."

★

"It is true, then, that the Vulcan male enters a mating cycle only once in seven years?"

To his surprised relief, Jillia had eased into this area of questioning with a tact and understanding of his reticence that all but eliminated his reluctance to speak of such matters. Still, he paced the small cabin as he spoke, pausing from time to time to stand before her, legs slightly spread, wrists crossed behind his back in a parade-rest stance that was somehow comforting to him. He stood thus before her now.

"True. At that time the drive becomes the sole purpose of a Vulcan's existance. All other matters except that urge simply cease to be."

She waited until he turned and started to stride away before asking, "And what of Vulcans who are not planet-bound? Does not traveling through so many time-warps disrupt the cycle?"

"A number of influences can create ... a variance," he replied slowly. "Distortions of time ... certain substances. The presence of a certain type of female is always ... disrupting ...."

His voice trailed off in uncertainty. Spock had been expecting that question and was now wrestling with an answer. The erotic thoughts and visions had returned despite all his efforts to banish them. He decided the effect was the result of some scent she wore, some chemical designed to provoke the very response that was occurring. The question was, why? And what should he do about it?

Jillia waited for him to turn, but he didn't. Suddenly flustered, she began to gather up her notes and stylus.

"Perhaps I shouldn't have asked that," she said. "It's late, and I've imposed upon you far too long. I'd better go."

"NO!" Spock pivoted and reached her in two swift strides. His hands clamped on her arms, biting into the soft flesh. Her notepad fluttered to the floor. Neither noticed.

Spock's obsidian eyes bored into Jillia's, seeking answers to questions he could not bring himself to ask. Slowly her chin tilted up, partly in defiance, partly

curious. Was he going to --?

Abruptly he released her, almost pushing her away from him.

"I do not understand what is happening," Spock grated. "My thoughts are not my own. I envision ... scenes ... that cannot be." His hand lifted slightly in a gesture of helplessness. "I know only that this is somehow related to you. I insist that you explain."

Jillia stood very still, her plump shoulders drooping.

"Oh, Spock. I'm so terribly sorry. I thought you knew. I thought everyone had been warned. I'm DELTAN."

She caught the look before he could mask his reaction. Deltans were supposed to be tall, slender, and totally hairless.

"I know. I don't fit the picture at all, do I? No one seems to know why I turned out like this. My mother swears my blood is pure, but not even she can explain my appearance. The scientists call me a 'sport', a throwback, other names .... The only attribute of my race that I possess is one that I would gladly trade for any of the others."

Abruptly she bent to retrieve her dropped notes. After a moment, Spock knelt next to her and took them from her hand.

"And so you believe that no one could find you attractive if it were not for that particular characteristic?"

"I had thought Vulcans would be immune."

"We are, to a very great degree. Now that I know, I have adjusted my internal chemistry to neutralize the effect." He paused a long moment, then said, "I still would not have you leave -- just yet ...." His fingers traced a formless pattern over the contours of her face. "You are indeed very beautiful."

And in fact the lushness of her rounded body pleased him as much or more than women he had known who were as lean and athletic as he. His only deception had concerned the matter of his immunity. He had made no effort to neutralize anything. As a Vulcan, he could control the effects of the pheromones Jillia could not suppress. But his Human half had no protection, and the air-borne chemicals were merrily wreaking havoc with Spock's endocrine system and delicate hormonal balance.

He could have walked away, but perhaps no one in the galaxy could better have understood the feeling of being an outcast than himself. He understood how desperately Jillia needed to believe that her attractiveness was not dependant on a physiological factor which she could not alter. It was a gift he alone could give her. Would it be such an onerous sacrifice?

Reaching out, he freed her hair from the restraining cord and let it fall in a wild tangle over her shoulders. His fingers brushed lightly over her arms, caught her hands, and he stood, raising her with him.

"Your skin is as soft as the petals of the Ophymlia blossom. I derive ... great pleasure ... from touching it." His voice had taken on the deep, husky tones that developed when he was moved in spite of himself. The words came reluctantly, for even under the present extenuating circumstances he felt a certain irrational shame in uttering them.

Matching the formality of Spock's words, Jillia replied, "And I derive great pleasure also, from your touch."

"Am I to then infer that ... you would not be ... opposed ... to a joining?"

Jillia felt a moment of panic at the sudden turn of events. The prospect of joining with the Vulcan was not undaunting. There had been others, of course. But none of her experiences had been entirely pleasurable. Most, in fact, had been close to disastrous. She had come to abhor the Deltan male who mated with her out of pity or curiosity almost as much as she did the non-Deltan who sought out one of her race -- *any* one of her race -- because of their reputation for sensuality. Even one of the scientists ....

And were not Vulcans supposed to be ... brutal while in the grip of their passions? Jillia promptly stifled that area of speculation; such conjecture made her feel as callous as those who had first used and then discarded her.

Now there was no time for further speculation of any sort. Spock, taking her silence for consent, had moved a step closer and was bending to claim her lips with his own.

Jillia was entranced. She could not imagine where he had learned to kiss so materfully. So far as she had been able to ascertain, it was not a Vulcan custom at all. But there was no disputing the fact of his mouth on hers, the aggressive invasion of his tongue. Her insides felt like taffy left too long in the sun.

Spock forced himself to concentrate on the spicy sweetness of her mouth. Despite the absence of Fever, his body was already goading him to seek out other, more intimate, orifices. He felt his blood pressure soaring. He could have told to the beat-per-second how much his pulse had increased, the last decimal point of his respiration. Blood flowed into secret cavities, making him long and hard. The Vulcan's hands slid down her back to cup each buttock and crush Jillia against his throbbing maleness. His mouth devoured hers.

After a time, Spock withdrew his right hand and raised it shoulder high, the fingers paired and spread as for the formal salute. "Mirror," he commanded hoarsely. In a moment, Jillia lifted her hand and fitted her palm to his. The contact was an electrical charge that jolted them both.

And with the contact came a certain co-mingling of sensation and communion. Spock would not permit it to reach the depth of the marriage-link or even the subsurface contact of the mind meld. But a resonance was palpably there and growing stronger. Spock cautiously opened to her and felt a fluttering like a trapped flitter-bee. Bemused, he identified it as the pulsing of Jillia's heart.

Spock's two lower fingers folded and he began to stroke Jillia's hand with the fused index and middle fingers. The caress was strangely intimate, the movements of his fingers between hers a passionate simulation of what was yet to come.

His weight shifted as he bent her backward, releasing her hand to press the soft mound of her breast. The flesh molded easily. As he had expected, she wore nothing beneath the silky gown. Her arms had crept timidly around his back; now they tightened and her hips rolled against his groin. Gasping at the exquisite pressure, Spock thrust reflexively, his body blind to the hindering folds of their clothing. It was time to be rid of <u>that</u>, Spock decided. He found the brooch-clasp that held the gown and opened it. The fabric dropped to the floor with a whispering slither.

Spock was reminded forcefully of earth-mother fetishes found so commonly among primitive societies. Jillia could have been the inspiration, the model for them all. Her breasts were firm and tip-tilted and heavy, threaded with delicate blue veins and topped with rosy pink nipples. At her waist her body narrowed, then flared into deeply curved hips and thighs. Her skin was a lovely pearl pink and covered with a nearly invisible white body down which, at the juncture of her thighs, became the same heavy golden bronze as her hair.

The surge of pheromones precipitated by the discarding of Jillia's gown made Spock's senses reel. He couldn't decide where he wanted to touch first, and he hesitated too long. Jillia flushed scarlet and seemed to wilt before his intense scrutiny. She turned away, seeking blindly for the security of the lost garment. Spock reached to place a finger beneath her chin and turn her to face him.

"Do not be embarrassed. I have said that you are beautiful --"

"No."

"-- and I would not say it if it were not so. Come to me." He reached again and one lush breast settled into his palm like a ripened peach. Spock bent to taste.

Jillia's breath caught as his lips brushed feathery kisses over her swollen nipples. Several moments passed as she tried to remember to breathe; when she did it was with a shudder that shook her entire body. Her arms tightened convulsively, tangling in the ebony robe. Spock uttered a short harsh syllable she chose not to interpret, and pulled away to remove the impeding garment.

The black fabric fell from his shoulders, leaving him naked but for the white undergarment which contrasted sharply against the verdant flush of his skin. Jillia

gazed at him, enthralled. He was more powerfully built than was apparent when he was clothed. His chest muscles were deeply defined, his belly hard and flat. His arms and thighs were lean but strong as a stallion's. An inky patch of coarse, crisp hair stretched from clavicle to groin. The evidence of his arousal, swelling the folds of the loin-wrap, stopped her eyes in mid-track. He looked enormous.

Spock felt a moment of dizziness as a wafting of pheromones overtook him, more gently than when he had undressed Jillia but no less intoxicating. He caught a ragged breath and reached out with fused fingers. Jillia matched the gesture. Silently the Vulcan led her to a neatly made bunk in one corner.

A confused slithering of hands developed into a harmony of motion. Thighs pressed thighs and entertwined. Fingers sought. At Spock's urging, Jillia unwound the loincloth, freeing a magnificient erection of palest jade.

Jillia stroked the length, not needing the resonance to tell her the great pleasure her touch gave. Spock lay trembling beneath her fingers, afraid she would stop, afraid she would not. A silvery drop of liquid gathered. Jillia caught it on a finger-tip and brought it to her lips. Her eyes met his. Did he want to ....?

"Later," he whispered. The Vulcan gathered himself and slowly moved into position above her. There were no words now, nor any need for them. Spock could feel the build-up of tension in her body; his own was screaming its demands. He guided himself to the waiting flesh, as steaming hot as his own. Jillia arched to meet him, alert to each motion, each sound, as the thick, heavy phallus pushed eagerly into her. He was trying to be gentle, but his body had other ideas and Jillia's empassioned wriggling was driving him to the brink of control.

Jillia had reached an equally lofty plateau. Her nails suddenly bit deeply into his back. Her body went rigid as wave after wave of pleasure surged over her. Jillia cried out her ecstacy -- only then did the Vulcan release himself.

The tension had built to the breaking point. He could no longer control the force or the depth of his thrusts. He no longer wanted to. The slick velvet flesh gripping him was tight, so tight that he could not hold back ....

With the driving force of a tidal wave, the Vulcan came.

★

Spock watched the last sparkle of the transporter dim, and swallowed something suspiciously like a lump in his throat. The parting was bittersweet, neither wanting their liason to end so soon, but both resigned that end it must. There were separate paths to follow. Jillia would be following hers with a new self-confidence apparent in every stride.

And Spock's existance had been altered as well. The revelation was startling to him that, in his desire to help mend the rip in Jillia's psyche, he had undergone a certain sort of healing of his own. He could not remember ever knowing such deep contentment. He had discovered that he was able to experience the pleasure he now knew his body had been designed to enjoy without the maddening spur of Fever. Could it happen without the influence of Deltan pheromones? He didn't know. But he did know that he would no longer be so reluctant to experiment. The gift that he had given Jillia had indeed been returned thricefold.

Counterweight

To honor the gift giver
requires an equal measure
Will you be my cup?

-- Ellen Hulley

"The Switch"

Part One: Wildfire

by Ann Zewen

"Doctor, may I have a moment of your time?"

Leonard McCoy looked up in shock as Spock entered Sickbay. The Vulcan usually avoided McCoy's domain like the plague, yet here he was, actually entering voluntarily, and asking to see the physician.

"Sure, Spock. Come on in. What can I do for you?" McCoy wasn't about to scare him off, not until he found out what was bothering the ship's first officer.

"I ...." Spock never hesitated to say what was on his mind. McCoy was becoming even more curious.

"C'mon, Spock. Tell me what's botherin' you."

The Vulcan turned his back on the doctor and walked over to a table, picking up a medi-scanner and handling it nervously. He took a deep breath and tried again; maybe it would be easier if he didn't look at McCoy while talking.

"I seem to have developed a ... problem." He didn't know how else to put it. "I ..." He took another deep breath. "I am somewhat confused. It is too soon, and it is not like the last time, but I can think of no other explanation for what has been happening for the past twenty-five point eight three hours. Would you mind examining me?"

McCoy was staring at him, his mouth hanging open in amazement. He couldn't believe what he had heard. Spock actually asking for an examination? It was unprecedented, and he could think of no logical -- he groaned at the word -- reason for the request, unless .... *Does he mean what I think he means?* he asked himself, then said aloud, "Sure, hop up on the table, and I'll give you a quick once-over."

Ignoring the doctor's casual idiom, the Vulcan did as instructed and stretched out on the diagnostic bed, waiting for McCoy to scan his body and check the readings.

"I don't understand. Your readings are all normal, except for a very slight, almost unmeasurable, elevation in hormone levels, not at all above that of a Human male and not near what was present last time during even the earliest stages of pon --"

"Then what is causing my discomfort?" Spock interrupted, not wanting to discuss the Vulcan mating cycle unless absolutely necessary.

"Perhaps if you explained the nature of your ... er, discomfort, I could help you more." He fought an urge to grin.

"I do not know exactly how to describe these sensations. The result is primarily a matter of being easily distracted from my work every time an attractive female comes near me. I ...." His voice trailed off in embarrassment.

"You what, Spock?" McCoy asked in a carefully even voice, uncharacteristically passing up the perfect opening to needle his friend, realizing the Vulcan was really bothered by this problem.

"I keep getting ... erections." The last word was whispered painfully. "And at night, in my sleep ...." His voice trailed off again in embarrassment, and he was unable to finish the sentence.

Oh, boy, McCoy thought. He recognized the symptoms all too well, but he was at

a loss to explain them.

"Spock, have you noticed anything else ... different about yourself lately? I mean, have you reacted in an unusual manner at all?"

He thought carefully before answering.

"I do not think so." There was no doubt about the honesty of the reply. "Can you diagnose my problem?"

"That depends on what you mean by 'diagnose'." McCoy's response only seemed to add to Spock's confusion. "I mean, I think I know what's wrong with you; I'm just not sure about the why of it."

"Please explain."

"Well, it seems that you're going through, well, er, puberty." It made no sense for a physician to blush over such a normal, natural biological fact, but McCoy's face felt warm just the same.

"Puberty?"

"Yes, it's something that happens to Human males in their early teen years, when --"

"Yes, I understand what 'puberty' is, but I do not understand why you believe I am experiencing it." He sat up on the edge of the bed before continuing. "Vulcans do not do so at any age, and, as for the Human part of my heritage, I am considerably past my teen years."

"I know, I know." His exasperation was showing. "I said I didn't know the why of it."

The sickbay doors suddenly slid open, and a considerably distracted Captain James T. Kirk entered. "Bones, have you got a minute?" he asked before noticing the other man sitting on the diagnostic bed. "Spock, is anything wrong?"

"I ...." The Vulcan looked helplessly at McCoy, unable to suffer through the explanation of his symptoms a second time, hoping that for once the physician would restrain his usual tendency to tease and simply give the explanation straight out, without embellishment.

McCoy controlled his amusement with an effort and responded to Spock's wordless plea, answering Kirk's question for him. "He has the symptoms of an adolescent going through puberty."

"Puberty?"

"Yes, it's when --"

"I know what it is -- only too well. I went through it myself a couple of decades ago, quite painfully, as I remember. But what makes you think Spock ...." The captain's voice trailed off, and he looked from one of his friends to the other in dawning understanding.

"Bones, those implants, they couldn't cause this, could they?"

"The implants? You mean, the ones ...."

"Yeah."

The other two men stared at Kirk, remembering other changes in personality or even physiological responses that had occurred among certain members of the crew who had been on a mission to Halgoria. The planet's inhabitants had taken them captive for a brief time, implanted control devices in their brains, and then experimented in switching certain integral parts of their basic identities between any two of their 'guinea pigs.' McCoy hadn't yet figured out how they worked or the best way to remove the implants, but since they didn't seem to pose any threat to the lives or health of the crewmen, he finally had left them in place for the time being.

Kirk and McCoy exchanged grins as they recalled the confusion that had reigned aboard the Enterprise for an entire week, as various crewmen went around acting in manners totally alien to their usual personalities. Everything from their emotional behaviour to their taste in foods to even their patterns of speech, choice of off-duty activities, and personal opinions had been changed, much to the dismay of those affected.

"Remember the look on Chekov's face when he started to ask for a 'glass of wodka' and found himself ordering 'a wee dram of scotch' instead?" Kirk reminisced.

"Yeah, but that wasn't nearly as funny as Scotty discussing the latest proposed modifications to the engines. I thought he was going to cry when he heard himself commenting on how the modifications were based on the theories of a Russian scientist named ... what was that name again?" McCoy almost had tears in his own eyes, he was laughing so hard.

"I don't remember." Kirk was having trouble controlling his own laughter. "What I do remember is the feeling of shock I experienced after Sulu asked to borrow one of my favorite books, and I actually offered to give it to him, in exchange for one of his foils -- and he accepted!" The captain was still outraged by the idea.

"Yeah," McCoy was holding his sides tightly to contain the laughter. "It's a good thing you both were willing to trade back when it was all over. And I've never enjoyed anything so much as the sight of you eating nothing but salads for a whole week. You actually lost all ten of those pounds I'd been trying to take off of you for the past three months."

"Yeah, well, that was just about the only real benefit of the experience; it was the only diet I never minded." He turned to Spock with a grin. "Although I don't think Spock'll ever get over the knowledge that he lived on junk food for seven whole days." He began to laugh again at the quickly masked look of outrage on his Vulcan friend's face.

"But best of all, Bones, was you and Spock." His laughter was completely out of control now, and he was forced to pull up a chair and sit down -- before he fell. "I'll never forget the look of you two, staring each other down, both with raised eyebrows, when you realized you were arguing in favor of logic and Spock wanted you to show a little more emotion. I swear I thought the galaxy had come to an end."

"So did I, until I realized what had happened. Those damned implants. I don't like anybody messin' around with my brain. And then usin' it to switch my emotions for Spock's logic! It's downright obscene."

"I do not understand the logic of your suggestion, Captain." Spock's voice, filled with mingled outrage and puzzlement, drew them back to the original discussion. "There has been no reoccurrence of the 'experiments' since we left the planet's influence three point two weeks ago."

"I don't know," McCoy interjected, trying to think through the problem. "I guess it's possible something could have triggered the implants and caused you to switch sex drives with someone else, but who?"

"Me." The single word drew questioning looks from both McCoy and Spock.

"You?" It was the doctor who asked.

"Yeah, that's what I came here to see you about. It seems for the past day I haven't felt any ... urges at all. I was beginning to be afraid it meant something was wrong with me." He grinned sheepishly.

"Does that bother you, Jim-boy?" McCoy teased his old friend gently.

"Well, not too much, not if it's only temporary." He grinned again, seeing the humor of his situation. "In fact, I'm getting a lot more work done in a lot less time. Fewer distractions," he explained in response to the raised eyebrows of his friends, then added ruefully, "I just wouldn't want it to last too long."

"Well, none of the other 'switches' lasted for longer than a week. I don't see why this one would, either. I suggest you just wait it out."

"Doctor?" They both turned at Spock's questioning voice. "What about me?"

"What about you?"

"How do I control my problem?" He turned to Kirk. "Surely you do not fight this all the time, Jim?" His eyes begged for reassurance.

"Of course not. Human males learn to control those urges when they're still in their teens. Bones?"

"Yeah, I guess it's just because you never went through puberty that you're having such trouble adjusting now. Try using some of those famous Vulcan control techniques. They should work on this, too."

"I have already tried, with no success." He was obviously frustrated.

"Then do what every healthy, red-blooded Human male does, Spock."

An eyebrow went up in query.

"Bones." Kirk's quiet voice held a stern warning.

"No, I guess not. Maybe I better just relieve you of duty 'for medical reasons' until you either learn to control it or the condition wears off. You can stay in your quarters, and you won't get embarrassed. I'm afraid there's not much I can do to eliminate the ... er ... discomfort, though, except maybe recommend a cold shower when it gets too bad."

Unable to continue the discussion any longer, Spock fairly fled to the sanctuary of his quarters. Once he was out of earshot, McCoy turned to Kirk with a grin.

"Well, Jim-boy, at least we have one thing to be thankful for." His grin widened. "This could have happened when he was in ...." He stopped himself from saying more when he saw the blood drain from Kirk's face. "Jim? Are you all right?"

"Yeah. Just don't suggest such a thing, not even as a joke. Don't even think it."

"Sure. Sorry."

★

"Captain?"

"Yes, Lieutenant?" Kirk turned to the communications station to hear Uhura's report on a transmission she was monitoring. The Enterprise was on patrol near the Romulan Neutral Zone, and, for the past few hours, had been picking up intermittent coded transmissions that might -- or might not -- mean the warrior race was considering a raid into Federation territory. He was concerned about the possibility, but not unduly worried. He had won showdowns with the Romulans before and was confident he could turn them back again.

"The transmissions are getting more difficult to decipher," she replied, impatient with her failure. "They're no longer just coding them; they're also deliberately blocking out parts of them. I think you have to superimpose one message over another to put a whole one together, but I haven't figured out the pattern yet.

"I have managed to pick up isolated words and phrases, though." She was a little more satisfied with her performance in that area. "Apparently they know we're here. I heard them say something about 'the Federation' and 'Enterprise' and 'Kirk' and 'zone.' Sorry, sir, but that's it for now. Perhaps Mr. Spock could --"

"Thank you, Lieutenant," he interrupted before she could ask where Spock was. No one had so far, and he hoped they wouldn't, for he had no idea what he was going to say if they did. Hoping to prevent such a question, he reassured Uhura about her work. "That's enough to tell us they probably know we're here, and maybe that's enough to keep them away. Let me know if you pick up anything else that's significant."

He gave her his most charming smile and noticed dispassionately how her eyes dropped from his, the dark brown irises hidden behind lowered lids, with long lashes lying feather-soft against her dusky cheeks. He continued to watch her, his eyes traveling lingeringly over her face, taking note of the smooth skin, the full, sensuous lips, the gentle curve of her cheeks, and the slightly up-tilted eyes. His gaze moved slowly downward, gauging the length of her neck, the feminine narrowness of her shoulders, the fullness of her breasts, and the way her voluptuous body curved inward before flaring outward again to create an extremely shapely form ....

"Captain?" She caught the look and was puzzled by it; he had never looked at her in quite that way before. She didn't understand.

Kirk flushed slightly, then turned away from her without comment. Anything he said would only increase the embarrassment for both of them. There was no way he could explain that he was merely admiring her beauty as he would that of a very special work of art. Under normal circumstances, he would never dare to allow himself the indulgence of so close a scrutiny, but safe from the potential betrayal

of his body, he had grasped the opportunity to examine the components that made up such a delightful whole.

Besides, he wanted to know the instant the effects of the implants began to dissipate, and there was no better way to gauge the most infinitesimal return of his normal libido than by paying close attention to such a tempting vision.

The situation was ironic; he had told McCoy and Spock that he had fewer distractions now, but the opposite was proving to be true. While he was experiencing no active sexual desire, the absence was worrying him like a sore tooth. He couldn't help but nudge his reactions -- metaphorically speaking -- every now and then just to see if normal responses were beginning to return. And on top of everything else, he was beginning to miss those feelings. It might be nice to admire Uhura's beauty without the distraction of arousal, but he frankly liked being aroused. Despite his rakish reputation, he wasn't really sexist. In fact, he respected and judged women professionally on the same basis as he did men. But he enjoyed that little extra edge of excitement, the slight rise in temperature that came from an underlying sexual attraction whenever he interacted with a beautiful woman, on any level, and he was far from reluctant to make the most of it. He missed that edge and warmth of desire, and he hoped it would return soon.

★

Kirk ended his shift and headed straight for Spock's quarters, feeling more than a little guilty. They had left Spock alone for most of the day before, last night, and all day today. He still hadn't reported for duty, so it was a safe bet he hadn't learned to control his 'problem' yet. On top of everything else, he must be getting bored by now.

The door to the Vulcan's quarters opened to the captain's request for entry, and he walked in to find Spock kneeling, his hands steepled in front of him, obviously attempting to meditate -- just as obviously without success. He seemed almost relieved by the interruption.

"Did you want something, Captain?" he asked in a carefully controlled voice. Only their long and close friendship enabled Kirk to know exactly how much that appearance of control was costing him.

"Just wanted to check on you, Spock ... see how you're doing."

"I am quite all right." He wasn't, and they both knew it, but each ignored the lie. Instead, Kirk sat down in a chair at the console and propped his feet up, settling in for a long chat. Maybe the distraction of a discussion about the Romulans would help his friend. He was doubtful, but maybe .... At least, it was worth a try.

"So there we sit," he concluded his outline of the ship's status some minutes later, "listening to their broken and coded transmissions, waiting for those damned Romulans to do something, anything, and not knowing if they're really planning anything at all. I tell you, it's the damndest assignment we've had in a long time. We've got absolutely nothing to do but watch, listen, and wait -- and stay on yellow alert the entire time, just in case something happens. I don't know how long my nerves can take this."

"Is that all that is bothering you?" For a fraction of a second there was almost a smile on the Vulcan's tense face as he bluntly asked the question.

Kirk flushed. "Well, no, not exactly. I ...." He paused a minute, unsure just how to describe the tensions that were bothering him, then tried again. "It's ... disconcerting to look at a beautiful woman and feel absolutely nothing," he blurted.

"Nothing?"

"Well, nothing more than a ...." Again he paused, searching for the words that explained what he had experienced on the bridge that day. "I don't know ... an appreciation, I guess. Like admiring the Mona Lisa, or Michaelangelo's David, or ...." He grinned sheepishly. " ... the Enterprise. Anyway, it's not the same thing, not the same at all."

"No, it is not." There was a universe of meaning in that statement, and Kirk understood it all -- for the first time.

He wanted to help, desperately, but he wasn't sure how. Every time he tried, he just felt embarrassed and guilty, like it was his fault that the Vulcan was suffering this agony. He knew it wasn't, but still it was his reactions Spock was experiencing. He had never been ashamed of his sexual needs before, but to see his friend trying to cope with them was different. He ought to be able to help him ... somehow.

Spock started to say something -- ask something, maybe? -- and Kirk leaned forward, anxious to help him with the right anwers, but the Vulcan stopped himself before he uttered the first syllable.

Before either of them could find the words to discuss the matter that was uppermost in both their minds, the buzzer sounded at the door. McCoy entered the cabin with Spock's supper, and Kirk sent him a look begging for help.

The ensuing conversation was a disaster, and Kirk had finally hurried McCoy from the room. Damn! If they were going to be of any help to Spock, they were going to have to get over their own embarrassment and discuss the matter with him calmly, rationally. Unfortunately, the transference hadn't given him any other Vulcan traits along with a diminished sex drive. He could use a little more emotional control right now.

★

Kirk glanced over to the science station and was oddly irritated to see Pavel Chekov sitting there. The young ensign was doing a fine job filling in for Spock, and Kirk usually was glad to give the junior officers in his command opportunities to display their growing skills, but not today. The captain missed the presence of his Vulcan friend, especially now, with the threat of a possible Romulan invasion hanging over their heads. He could always count on his first officer's sane, logical analysis of any dangerous situation. Often that analysis provided him with the deciding data that determined what action he would take in a given situation. Without that input, he was just a little bit less sure of his own decision-making ability. And he didn't like not being sure of himself. He didn't like it at all.

This was the third day of Spock's self-imposed seclusion, and that fact -- along with Kirk's increasing impatience with his own 'condition' and the tedium of being constantly on alert for an attack that might never materialize -- was beginning to put the captain's temper on edge. He was having to fight a continuous battle to keep from snapping at his officers whenever he talked to them, and he was starting to lose that battle more times than he won.

Drumming out a staccato rhythm on the arm of his command chair, Kirk swiveled around to face the communications station and ask Uhura for yet another update on the Romulan transmissions she was monitoring, and he gasped softly when his eyes connected with hers. Instead of the maddening detachment of the past few days, he felt a warmth curling deep in his belly, and a familiar stirring he quickly brought under control. After the initial shock, he smiled to himself in relief, then had to exert even stronger measures of control when Uhura returned his smile tentatively.

Turning quickly back to face the viewscreen, Kirk silently congratulated himself on the beginning of his return to normal, then he grinned happily as he realized that if he were returning to normal, Spock would be, too. Soon the Vulcan would be back on the bridge.

Kirk decided he would pay his friend another visit after his duty shift was over. It must be really boring for him, forced to stay in his cabin for three days. Feeling especially magnanimous and inordinantly pleased with himself, the captain grinned again and then began to whistle under his breath, looking forward to the evening, and perhaps a game of chess ....

★

Kirk paced the length of his quarters, increasingly nervous as he remembered his latest, disastrous visit with Spock. Damn! He had been so sure earlier that things were getting back to normal, but he had known instantly that Spock was getting worse, not better. And he hadn't been any help at all. Had he actually suggested masturbation as a possible solution for Spock? Spock, for crying out loud! His memory of the outrageous conversation caused his cheeks to burn with embarrassment and anger at himself. His guilt over his friend's condition was growing. It might be illogical, but he still felt responsible.

And added to everything else was his ... resentment, he guessed, for the fact that Spock seemed able to discuss his problem with Christine Chapel easier than he could with his best friend. Knowing the nurse's feelings for Spock and that Spock was just as aware of those feelings but apparently unable to return them, Kirk was surprised the Vulcan had been able to find enough courage to ask her anything, much less something as personal as this. But he had, and Kirk felt a stab of what could only be jealousy, then quickly clamped a lid on the emotion, ashamed of himself for having such a selfish reaction. He should be glad someone could help his friend when he so obviously couldn't. But it still hurt, and the resentment only intensified his feelings of guilt.

As for his own situation, Kirk was more confused than ever. Thoughts of a very special experience in his wayward youth brought none of their usual excitement despite the earlier promising signs. None at all. He had felt no fire, no desire, no nothing. He glanced down at himself in disgust, wondering if he would ever know that kind of excitement again.

Suddenly, the vision of a dark head bent over a communications console entered his mind, and he felt himself stir, as he had on the bridge. He swore again and dropped into a chair. How could such an innocent image be so arousing when the thought of the naked blonde beauty who had taken his own youthful innocence left him cold?

Maybe it was just that his usual urges would return gradually, a little bit at a time, he speculated hopefully to himself. And maybe it would take a little closer stimulus to do the job than a twenty-year-old memory. He tested his theory again and indulged himself briefly with the thought of Uhura's voluptuous body as he had eyed it so intently and yet dispassionately two days before. The reaction he got now was anything but dispassionate. Again he felt the warmth and stirring he had first noticed that afternoon on the bridge, even stronger this time -- and she wasn't even in the room this time. As he felt the flames of desire begin to spread through his body like wildfire, he grinned in relief. Yep! He would soon be his same old horny self, as Bones would say.

★

On the next day, the fifth of what Kirk and McCoy were jokingly referring to as "The Switch," Spock finally reappeared on the bridge. There had been no explanation for his absence, and he gave none for his return. Kirk welcomed him back with a relieved twinkle in his eyes.

"Feeling better, Mr. Spock?" he asked, hopefully looking for some sign that Spock's symptoms were finally beginning to dissipate.

"Much, Captain." The Vulcan immediately swung his chair around to the computer station, intent on monitoring the Romulan transmissions along with Uhura, and pointedly ignoring the beautiful young yeoman who approached him with a tray of coffee. He kept his back turned, muttering something under his breath, almost as a chant.

"Mr. Spock?"

"No, thank you, Yeoman." It was said through clenched teeth, and the young woman was sure she must have been mistaken when she thought she heard him whispering over and over again the one word: "Contol, control, control ...."

Kirk grinned, in spite of the dashing of his earlier hopes. Poor Spock. Apparently, he was having more trouble getting rid of the remnants of his friend's very strong libido than the same friend was having in regaining it. It was hard to stay

so concerned when he had such clear evidence that the implant's effects were already beginning to wear off. It was just taking a little longer in Spock's case, that was all. Must be something to do with his Vulcan heritage.

Kirk's worries of the night before had disappeared completely when he woke up this morning, with the distinct evidence of his returning arousal. With only a little more effort than usual -- not a high price to pay for the end of the past few days of non-response -- he had managed to bring his burning body back under control and had reported for duty in plenty of time for his usual shift.

It had been harder to deal with his continuing feelings of guilt, embarrassment, and jealousy concerning Spock's problem and his own inability to provide him with the advice and support he needed to cope with it. But he was determined not to let the situation get him down. He grinned again at his own, unintentional pun.

Turning back to face the viewscreen at the front of the bridge, the captain stopped smiling abruptly and caught his breath almost in pain at the same moment Lieutenant Uhura approached him with a communications report needing his signature. The wildfire invaded his body yet again, tongues of flame licking along his veins so rapidly he found it difficult to bring himself back under control. As the heat swept through his entire body, his heartbeat accelerated to an almost painful rate, and he found it almost impossible to breathe. Grabbing the report, he quickly initialed it, then shoved it unceremoniously back into her hands.

"Captain?" The voice -- why had he never noticed before exactly how sultry it was? -- was hesitant. "Is anything wrong?"

"Nothing at all, Lieutenant. Carry on." He tried to hide his intense reaction from her -- and, even more difficult, from himself. He ran a hand around the neckline of his shirt and then wiped the perspiration from his forehead. Damn! Why was it so hot on the bridge today?

From the computer station, Spock eyed his captain and the lieutenant carefully, one eyebrow raised. After a brief moment, however, he saw Kirk relax, and he returned his attention to his own work, telling himself his suspicions were unfounded. He had been telling himself that since the previous night. It was getting increasingly difficult to believe.

After that, the day went from bad to worse. It was a toss-up as to who was having the most difficulty. Spock tried to tell himself that he was, since he was fighting reactions to every woman on the bridge, while Jim seemed to be having trouble handling his response to only one person. But that realization forced him to admit that his suspicions were not as unfounded as he had tried to make himself believe, increasing his concern and keeping him on the bridge when every instinct told him to flee back to his cabin.

Watching his captain try to cope with the demands of his command under the threat of Romulan invasion along with the increasingly burning needs of his own body, the Vulcan reached a difficult decision.

Tonight, he told himself. Tonight, he would do something about it. He had to; one of them had to remain on the bridge, and it wasn't going to be Jim -- at least not for the next few days. Glancing to his side, he acknowledged to himself that Jim's wouldn't be the only absence from the bridge and that the loss of a second, so-vital crewmember at this critical time made his presence there even more necessary. *Tonight,* he told himself again.

★

Kirk almost walked into the door to Spock's quarters when it failed to open in response to his voice. He stared at it a moment, puzzled. Spock never locked his door. Hell, he hadn't even locked it the past few days. Why now? If he had managed to get through a day on the bridge, surely he at least was pretty well recovered from his problem. Maybe he was just exhausted and didn't want to be bothered. But, damn, he needed to talk with his friend -- now!

Kirk was beginning to suspect that his own problem, rather than ending, was

merely taking a new, possibly dangerous direction. He desperately needed Spock's advice. He reached for the buzzer, and found the privacy lock engaged there, too. Damn! Spock's preoccupation with protecting himself from detection by the rest of the crew was making a difficult matter even more difficult.

Clenching his hands, Kirk returned to his own quarters, and punched Spock's code into the comm console. Maybe he would answer that. Instead, he found still another privacy lock engaged, with the notation on the screen that Commander Spock was to be contacted only in case of extreme emergency. Kirk was one of only two people who could override that lock, but that was true without the extra notation; that was obviously a message to him and McCoy to lay off for a while. The Vulcan really didn't want to be disturbed. He considered the possibility that Spock might not be alone, then dismissed it. After resisting these new demands on his body for this long, he wouldn't give in now, especially now that the effects of the implants were beginning to wear off.

They were, weren't they? Surely Spock was finding control easier now. He hoped so; he was beginning to fear that he was losing his completely. Images of a raging fire, its heat all too real, kept flashing through his mind. Rubbing his forehead wearily, once again wiping away the perspiration, he briefly considered overriding the privacy lock anyway, dismissed that idea, and then thought about calling McCoy for advice. Glancing at the chronometer, he realized it was well after midnight, and decided to wait until morning. If things weren't better by then, he would get help. For now, he would just try to get some rest.

But sleep eluded the starship captain that night; his mind and body constantly plagued by tempting visions of a dark beauty, clad in red, bending over a communications console -- and all surrounded by uncontrollable, towering flames.

★

Early the next morning, Kirk was back in Sickbay, pacing in nervous anticipation of the doctor's arrival. When McCoy finally entered, the captain pivoted to face him, agitation clear in every line of his body, his face damp with perspiration.

"Jim? Is anything wrong?"

"Bones ...." His voice trailed off, and he turned his back on his friend, unable to face him.

"Jim?" The voice was more gentle this time, as was the hand that he placed on his captain's shoulder. The physician almost jerked back in startled reaction to the heat radiating from Kirk's body. "Jim?" he repeated again.

"I'm in trouble, Bones."

"Yeah, I can see that. Wanta tell me about it?"

"Do I have to? Or can't you guess?"

"Yeah, well ... I guess the only question now is what to do about it. Let me check you over and see how far this has progressed. Maybe the effects of the implant will wear off before you're in any danger.

Kirk just looked at him, knowing such hopes were futile, but he gave in anyway and stretched out on the diagnostic bed to allow the doctor to do his work. McCoy felt a leaden weight settle in his stomach the minute he saw the read-outs on the monitors. Heart rate, respiration, body temperature, hormone levels -- they were all much too high, dangerously so.

"Well?" Kirk was impatiently waiting for his diagnosis.

"I don't think you'd better wait for this to wear off." The total absence of humorous teasing usually found in McCoy's voice was indicative of the seriousness of the situation. But, then again, Kirk hadn't really needed the medical diagnosis to tell him that.

"I don't know why, but it's progressing much faster for you than it did for Spock." The physician paused in his diagnosis, remembering that this man was not just another patient, not even just his commanding officer; this was one of his oldest and closest friends. The next words were the hardest of all to say. "At

this rate, you'll be dead in twenty-four hours unless something is done."

Now sitting up, Kirk wearily rested his forehead in his right hand, the elbow propped on his knee. He was still sitting like that, with McCoy watching him worriedly, when Spock entered the sickbay a few minutes later. The Vulcan looked from one of his friends to the other, then spoke softly.

"So, it has begun."

"Yes." It was the doctor who answered, somehow not at all surprised at Spock's instant understanding of the situation.

"How bad?"

"Bad enough." McCoy withdrew behind a wall of professionalism, giving his prognosis in flat, clipped tones completely at odds with his usual sometimes-friendly, sometimes-sarcastic drawl. "I estimate he has about twenty-four hours, unless he takes action to resolve the situation."

"Bones! How the hell can I 'take action'?" In his frustration and despair, he struck out at the nearest target. "This isn't simple sexual arousal. I can't just pick a likely woman and spend a couple of hours in the sack with her, even if I did make a habit of fraternization." He deliberately ignored the burning vision of a red-clad lieutenant.

McCoy and Spock exchanged an understanding glance. They knew Kirk intentionally kept his liaisons separate from his crew, and they were too far away from a pleasure planet for him to find relief that way. Besides, Spock knew that solution would never have worked anyway -- neither would "a couple of hours in the sack."

"Who, Jim?" he asked finally, and Kirk's head snapped up as he realized the Vulcan understood his dilemma only too well. Their eyes met, but he refused to answer, mentally pushing away the flaming image of long lashes lying against dark cheeks and another of voluptuous curves that made his hands tremble in forbidden anticipation.

"What do you mean, Spock?" McCoy asked, clearly puzzled by the exchange.

"Just <u>any</u> woman will not do at such a time, Doctor. It must be a bondmate, or at least someone to whom he is particularly drawn, even if he never realized it before. The fever in his blood burns strong, drawing him to a specific woman; only she can satisfy his needs."

"But who?"

"Only he can answer that question."

Kirk looked back up at Spock and realized he meant the response kindly. He knew; he just wouldn't say because it wasn't his place to.

"Uhura." The word came in a harsh whisper, and McCoy's almost-Vulcan eyebrow slid high up on his forehead in shocked surprise, then back down as he realized it wasn't completely unexpected.

"Then you'll have to ...."

"NO!"

"Jim, be reasonable. Your life depends on this. She'll understand."

"Captain ... Jim. The doctor is correct. You have no choice. Would it help if I explai --"

"No! I ... I'll explain myself." He sighed in resignation. "Just tell her ... Tell her I need to see her, in my quarters." He looked up at his friend, desperation in his eyes. "Spock, how long will this last?"

"Unknown. Normally, for a Vulcan, it lasts about ten days." He was uncharacteristically inexact with the time estimate. "But you are Human; you might react differently. And we do not know what will happen when the effects of the implant wear off.

"I would say the odds are ..." he hesitated, then returned to his usual exactitude, "... six point five eight to one that it will end as soon as the implant loses its effectiveness, in one point nine six days."

Kirk stared at him, not daring to ask whether the odds he had just quoted were real or simply an attempt to reassure him. He didn't really want to know.

★

"Come," he called in response to the buzzer, once again fighting against the image of being consumed by flames. Captain James T. Kirk wiped his trembling hands along the sides of his pants legs, attempting to rid himself of the perspiration that coated the palms.

"Captain, Mr. Spock said you wanted to see me."

"Yes, Lieutenant. Please sit down." He started to gesture her into a chair, then quickly jerked his hand behind his back as he realized it was trembling. He glanced at her quickly to see if she had noticed, but there was only a look of mild curiosity on her open face. His eyes devoured that face, so beautiful, the dark skin so smooth, the eyes exotic, the mouth .... Kirk turned away from her as he felt the increasingly familiar heat invade both his body and his mind again.

"Captain?" She seemed confused, and more than a little curious.

He took a deep breath, wiped his face yet again, and then turned back to face her again, knowing he had to tell her -- somehow.

"Lieutenant ... Uhura." It didn't make sense to call her by her rank in this situation. "I ..." He took still another deep breath before attempting to continue. "I've asked you to come here because I find I need to ...." Again, he stopped. This was ridiculous. Jim Kirk never had trouble approaching a woman. But this wasn't just any woman, and the circumstances were far from normal.

"Uhura, you're aware of the implants that were placed in many of us when we were captured by the Halgorians, aren't you?"

"Yes, Captain. How could I not be?" She smiled in memory of Scotty's broad Scottish brogue emanating from Chekov's mouth and the clipped Russian tones coming from the dour Scotsman.

"Yes, of course you knew." He paused again, wondering what in space to say to her next, then he resumed his attempted explanation in a voice as carefully controlled as that of a Vulcan. "We all thought we had escaped the effects of the implants when we left Halgoria behind us, Uhura, but apparently we were wrong."

She continued to look at him, inquiringly. He groaned mentally. Nyota Uhura was an intelligent woman. Why couldn't she pick up on what he was trying to say? Was he going to have to spell it out to her, in detail? He took still another deep breath and continued.

"Several days ago, Spock and I began noticing certain ... er ... changes in ourselves, and after consulting with Dr. McCoy, we realized that apparently we had exchanged ... uh ...." His voice trailed off painfully as he found himself unable to continue.

"Yes, Captain. What was it you exchanged?" He was going to have to spell it out.

"Our sex drives." He blurted it out and then turned away from her again, unable to verbalize the rest of it.

Uhura found herself unable to avoid smiling just a little at the images that came to her mind, but her smile died as she realized exactly how difficult this conversation was for her captain.

He seemed strangely vulnerable. His hands were clasped behind his back, and she noticed they were both trembling and perspiring. It didn't make sense. If Kirk and Spock had exchanged sex drives, then the captain should be feeling virtually nothing at all. Christine had told her that Vulcans experienced uncontrollable sexual desire only when ... *Oh, no,* she thought. *He couldn't be.*

"Captain? Are you --"

"YES!" Pushed beyond his endurance, Kirk shouted it at her, then sank into a chair on the opposite side of the room, once again wearily resting his forehead in his hand. He continued in a softer voice, forcing himself to say the forbidden words: "Yes, Uhura, I .... It's pon farr."

She stood and walked across the room to him, resting a hand on his shoulder, feeling the flame-like heat radiating from his body, beginning to understand his strange behavior of the past few days.

"Captain ...." She hesitated a minute, then continued in a gentle voice, her understanding growing. "Jim, is that why you sent for me?"

"Yes." It was barely a whisper, more like a sigh. He looked up at her standing at his side, again he felt his heartbeat quicken, and a shudder shook his entire body. "Yes, Uhura ... Nyota, that's why I sent for you. It seems that you ... that I ...." He stopped again and shook his head to clear it of the images of fire.

"You need my help?"

"Yes." Just the one word.

"Is it only my help you need, or would anyone do?" She had to ask, knowing she might not like the answer.

"Yours."

Something held taut within her seemed to relax, and she smiled at him. "In that case ...." The smile broadened into a grin, and she took his burning hand, leading him toward the sleeping quarters adjacent to his office space. He followed her, feeling relief already, now that she knew what he needed and accepted the responsibility.

When they arrived at the side of his narrow bed, she dropped his hand and lifted both of her own to rest on his chest, slowly sliding them upward, across his broad shoulders and around his neck, pulling his still-reluctant head down to hers for a searing kiss. As their lips finally met, his arms closed around her, and he crushed her to him, grinding his open mouth against hers. She returned the bruising kiss for a moment, then pulled her head away from his.

"Take it easy, Jim," she teased him, trying to lighten the mood a little. "We've got plenty of time."

"No, we don't." His eyes blazed into hers. "I need you now, Nyota. Right now. The fire ... I can't fight the flames any longer. I need --" He broke off and began to kiss her again. She understood the urgency as he ground his hips into hers and she felt the pulsating erection straining to break free of his pants. Suddenly, he was ripping the clothes from her body, and she hurried to relieve him of his own uniform.

Moments later, she was lying on his bed, completely naked, and his burning eyes were devouring her in his hunger. He touched the tip of one breast with a hot, trembling hand, then, unable to wait any longer, he was on top of her, thrusting into her with deep, hard, battering strokes. The friction of the first few thrusts was almost painful, as he hadn't taken time to prepare her for his entry. Understanding the need that drove him, she didn't complain, but simply opened herself more completely to him and drew his mouth down to hers, giving him the love she had held in check for years. Gradually, discomfort gave way to a need within her that matched his, and she felt excitement building toward an inevitable climax.

As the waves of pleasure trailed away, she realized he was still battering at her, far from his own so-badly needed release. Sliding her hands caressingly down his back to his taut buttocks, she encouraged him to continue the pleasurable assault on her body, and once again the fire began to rage within her, too. Suddenly, his body stiffened, and he erupted into her, collapsing still on top of her afterwards to gasp for breath.

Gradually she realized that despite his orgasm he still was huge inside her, and she resumed caressing him, drawing his face up to hers so she could kiss him teasingly, stroking his lips with her tongue until he opened them to allow her admittance. Once inside, she licked at his teeth, his tongue, and even the roof of his mouth, their tongues dancing together as their passion began to build once again. As she drew her own tongue back into her mouth, his followed, and he hungrily tasted all the places within.

They broke the kiss, gasping, then she began to lick her way along his jawline toward his ear, her tongue tickling him as she went. After reaching her target and nibbling on the lobe a few seconds, she shifted directions and worked her way down the column of his neck to kiss his collarbone and continue still lower.

Suddenly, he stopped her and rolled onto his back, drawing her with him to straddle his body, his shaft still buried deep within her. Placing her hands on his shoulders, she pushed upward, smiling into his face, understanding what he wanted. Slowly at first, she began to lift herself off him until only the tip was still inside, quickly dropping back down in a movement that drew a groan from his throat and shot an equal thrill of pleasure through her own body.

Encouraged by the feverish hands caressing her hips, thighs, and buttocks, she increased the rhythm until she arched her back and cried out with still another orgasm. At the same moment, he pulled her down onto him so hard the first spasms spiraled upwards into an even more intense explosion, and she felt him come deep within her, seconds before everything faded into blackness and she collapsed on top of him.

★

An unmeasurable time later, she woke to find herself lying on her back, Jim leaning over her with his head propped up on one hand. His face was deadly serious as his other hand gently caressed the curve of her left cheek. She smiled tentatively at him.

"Nyota." He said it almost reverently, then attempted a smile of his own. It fell a little short of his usual charm, but she found the expression that much more endearing and lifted her own hand to touch his cheek in return.

"Yes, Jim," she teased him. "You wanted something?" Her hand trailed downward from his face, across his smooth chest and then still further below to grasp him in her firm clasp. He gasped in reaction.

"Well, look what I found." She continued the game. "It seems to be alive and ... hungry?" Their eyes met, an imp of devilment in hers, and a deep intensity in his.

She faltered for a second, then continued, determined not to let him be overwhelmed by the seriousness of his needs, instead wanting him to enjoy the experience and be able to look back on it later with joy and humor rather than shame or sorrow. Then, she resumed her teasing. "Let's see what we can do to help it out."

Pushing him onto his back, she kissed her way down his body and then drew him into her mouth, greedily working on him until he erupted inside, then swallowing what seemed like gallons of the salty substance. When the eruptions stopped, she lifted up and smiled at him, wiping her mouth on her hand, then stretching out full length on top of him.

"Still ... hungry?" She sympathized with him as she reached his mouth and kissed him again, the erect nipples of her full breasts brushing like flames across his chest. "What would you like now?"

Although he was still erect, his need wasn't so painful now, the once-raging wildfire brought under control, and he had experienced enough relief so that he could respond to her teasing in kind, finally enjoying this encounter on a mental, as well as physical, level.

"No, you minx," he laughed up at her. "This time it's my turn," and he turned her over onto her back, taking the dominant position again and beginning to kiss his way down her body as she had his earlier. Pausing to nibble at her breasts a while, he slid a hand between her legs and stroked the slick folds, sliding first one and then a second finger inside her, caressing her depths. Not missing a stroke of his fingers, he abandoned her breasts and continued to blaze a trail down her body until he reached the crisp hair between her legs. His tongue licked along the hairline, then dipped lower and began to flick against the hard center of her pleasure. Her body jerked in reaction as he found the most sensitive spot, and she gasped in the first of a series of mini-climaxes that continued to build in intensity until her entire body was shaking and she was unable to stop herself from crying out.

Finally, he lifted his mouth from her and slid back up along her body, his fingers remaining inside her until he was ready to replace them with his throbbing

manhood. Raising himself to his knees, he lifted her legs up and across his shoulders to deepen the penetration, thrusting into her again and again for what seemed to her like hours as she shuddered with orgasm after orgasm until finally he reached his own climax, flooding her with his seed and collapsing at her side. Finally, exhausted, they slept.

★

Uhura awoke to find Jim smiling gently down at her, a welcome calmness on his features.

"It's over?" she asked, filled with a curious reluctance to hear his answer.

"Yes." He smiled again. "I'm back to normal."

"Oh." Remembering the shared passion of the past two days, her voice was small with disappointment until she noticed the grin spreading across his face. Taking her hand in his, he drew it to his body, warm, but without the raging wildfire that had plagued him the past few days, and she caught her breath in joy. "I said normal, Nyota, and I meant normal ... for me." She answered his grin with one of her own as her hand closed over the throbbing shaft.

"I'm not a Vulcan," he told her, his lips inching closer to hers. "My needs don't end when pon farr does. Do you think you can ... 'open a channel' for me?"

"Open, sir," she whispered, and they both chuckled softly as his mouth closed over hers.

JIM

Our mutual passion spent,
You sleep deeply, peacefully, while
I stretch, catlike, purring with satisfaction.
I had wanted you so long
Imagined you in every detail
Your hands, your lips, your tongue.
Women's talk had speculated,
Named you a consummate lover.
I shall not tell them they were right.
I touch my breasts,
My nipples tender and swollen,
Tokens of your eager loveplay.
A small bruise darkens one white curve --
To mark me yours, you said,
Smoky desire in your tender laugh.
The first time was good,
The second will be better.
How shall I awaken you?
With gently thrusting tongue?
Or insistent, caressing fingers?
Which would you prefer,
My captain, my lover.

-- Deborah Goby
(c) 1988

"The Switch"
Part Two: Anytime

by Linda Pugh Baker

Spock took a moment to respond to the buzzer. He used the time to control the irritation that washed over him at the interruption. They had left him alone yesterday. The solitude and his attempts at meditation had helped to reestablish some of his equilibrium since learning that he had Jim Kirk's sex drive ... and Jim had his.

He rubbed the spot on his temple where the implant was buried beneath his skin, and considered not answering the summons. The buzzer sounded again, more stridently, and he pressed a button on his console. "Yes?" It might be Jim.

"Mr. Spock, may I come in, please?"

The voice was unmistakably Christine Chapel's. His body responded illogically as his mind cried out *No! Not her! Not now!* He could not possibly control his reactions.

"Mr. Spock?"

"I do not wish to be disturbed," he said stiffly, coldly.

"I've brought you something to eat. I'll only be a minute."

The cool, reasoning tone made him suspicious. Would McCoy have told her? She would normally have been cowed by his cold response. "I do not wish to eat."

He heard her sigh of exasperation. "Sir, I don't want to pull medical rank on you, but my arms are getting tired holding this tray. Would you please open the damn door?"

There was so much of McCoy in her voice that he obeyed, hitting the release with more force than was necessary.

"Thank you," Chapel said sweetly, placing the tray on the console in front of him.

It contained soup, salad, and juice, a normal meal for him. Despite his protests to the contrary, the food did look good, and it had been over twenty-four hours since he had last eaten.

"Doctor McCoy says you can eat this way or take injections. I thought you'd prefer this." She smiled down at him.

"Thank you." He hoped she would leave now. He kept his eyes on the tray, concentrating on how hungry he was. Her nearness was an agony. He could smell her, feel her. He wanted to look down to see if his erection was visible, but feared that the movement would draw her gaze.

"I ... took the liberty of bringing you these, too." She laid a computer tape on the console beside the tray. "Booklets for ... adolescent boys. I think they'll help you understand what your body is going through."

He looked up at her for the first time since she'd entered, the mixed surprise and pain on his face evident for a fleeting moment. "You know!" he protested before his control caught up with his humiliation. He looked away, restoring his carefully schooled expression of impassivity.

She turned to go, pausing at the door to say gently, "Yes, I know. I'm the head nurse on this ship, Mr. Spock. How efficient do you think Sickbay would be if medical problems were kept secret from me?"

He seemed to relax a touch at her words. A medical problem. "Yes, that is ... quite logical. I ... apologize."

"No need." She shrugged and started to leave, then turned back once more.

For a moment he feared she would come into the room again, touch him; instead she leaned against the door. He had to force himself to not allow his eyes to slide over her body. If only she did not look down, did not discover his condition, he could bear her presence.

"You know, my brothers were near enough my age that I remember what they went through. It's not an easy time for Human males, much less for --" She smiled apologetically, as if she'd said too much and finished instead with, "I'm sure you're strong enough to handle it." She was nearly out the door when his voice stopped her.

"Christine. Thank you."

She shrugged again. He could not help but notice the way her breasts shifted with the movement.

"Anytime. I'll be back tonight to give you a sedative."

Before he could protest, she was gone. It seemed he could still smell her. Her absence did not ease the pressure, but her words soothed his agitation.

★

Chapel reached the turbolift before she began to shake. She leaned against the wall and closed her eyes, breathing deeply. Who said Humans don't have control? She had no idea from where the strength had come to stay so cool. Somehow she'd managed not to say the wrong thing. Her hands hadn't shaken. Her voice hadn't shaken. But her insides were in knots.

For so long the sight of him had been enough to make her knees weak with desire. But he had been so ... vulnerable, so raw, that all she felt, even with him obviously aroused, was the urge to rock him like a baby. *If I had an implant,* she thought, *I'd think Spock and I had traded emotional control.*

She wiped her forehead, trying to clear her head, and headed for Sickbay. This was too much!

Her thought as she reached Sickbay was, *I'm going to kill Leonard.* Murderous inclination was obvious on her face when she entered the lab.

Leonard McCoy glanced up from the tape he was viewing and straightened rapidly. "Didn't go so good, huh?"

"It went fine. Leonard, why did you send me? Couldn't you have taken Spock his lunch?"

"Well, the tape was your idea," he said defensively.

"It wasn't my idea for me to take it." She turned away to compose herself. Where was her damned control now?

"Chris, honestly, I plead lack of common sense. I was so wrapped up in the implants that when you suggested it, I was just relieved to have you take worrying about him off my hands for a while." He shut off the viewer and moved to put a fatherly hand on her shoulder.

"Did he --" He bit off his words. He'd almost said 'Did he throw you out again?'

"He didn't do anything. He was very civil, very polite. He even thanked me. But do you have any idea how hard it is to stand in the room with a man with an erection and not look down?"

McCoy laughed. "No, how hard was it?" He leered at her and stepped back to avoid the blow she aimed at his gut. "Okay, sorry, I couldn't resist."

He held up his hands for peace. "Maybe I misunderstood, Christine. He said ... well, maybe next time we'd better send one of the male techs. But my better judgement tells me he needs to face this, not hide from it."

She nodded. "I want to help. But I don't think making him deal with me, or any woman in his quarters, is the solution. It's not like his condition is permanent.

Why can't he just hide from it?"

McCoy grasped her shoulders. "You can help by loaning me that brain of yours. Come over here and look at this tape. If I can figure out what the damn things are, or how they work, maybe I can figure out how to get them out. Then it'll all be a moot point."

★

McCoy delivered Spock's supper himself, dreading the apology he had to make for his blunder with Christine. He didn't mind admitting he'd made a mistake, but he was sure Spock would have a few well-chosen words to say on the subject.

Kirk was already there when he entered, sitting with his feet propped up on the console, running over the day's events. The look he shot McCoy told him that things weren't going well.

Before Spock could say anything, McCoy raised his hand in a conciliatory gesture. "Don't say it. I'm sorry about sending Christine with your lunch. I plead an attack of stupidity."

Spock looked away from him quickly, his face flushing. "No apology is necessary, Doctor. I do not object," he said stiffly.

"You don't?" McCoy looked at him askance.

Spock wished McCoy would let the subject drop. Just the thought of a woman in the room made him feel overheated. "Is there a reason why I should?"

"Well, because she's a woman." The comment sounded comical, and McCoy grinned at himself before they could.

He grinned even wider as Kirk, who had been following the conversation with interest, commented wryly, "That's rather obvious, Bones, even to me."

McCoy then sobered as he turned back to Spock. "You said 'attractive females' were causing you some discomfort. I was so involved in what I was doing, I didn't even think how it might affect you to send one to your quarters."

"Miss Chapel was very professional. I did not --" Spock faltered at McCoy's look. How much had she noticed? How much had she reported to McCoy? Masking his discomfort, he chose to be uncomfortable in silence rather than be the brunt of McCoy's atrocious humor.

Grinning, McCoy went over and shoved Jim's feet off the console so he could sit down. Spock seemed his usual irritating self to him. "Well, good then. I'm glad you're getting the situation in hand."

Kirk coughed significantly. McCoy cheerfully pounded him on the back.

Spock watched them with the feeling he'd missed something. The entire situation was disturbing enough. He could not even go out for a walk. The things happening to his body were affecting his mind in a way that he did not understand. He needed someone to speak with about them. Meditation was not helping any more than his normal control over his body had. Jim turned red and stuttered every time he tried to lead the conversation in that direction, and McCoy grinned idiotically at everything and made cryptic remarks.

How did Human males control this? He'd never seen one with a lack of control this obvious. McCoy said they learned while still young, but how? And why couldn't he find the courage to ask outright?

"I guess you won't mind if Christine gives you your shot tonight, then." McCoy was still grinning, ignoring Kirk's look of warning.

Spock swallowed. "I do not want a sedative," he said, pleased with himself for sounding so cool. He had gotten himself into this. McCoy had been contrite for sending her, and he had played his impassivity too far. Now the doctor did not realize how painful it really was. He did not think he could bear the look on the doctor's face if he told the truth.

"I didn't ask you. I was just askin' whether you could control your horny self long enough for her to give it to you."

Spock did not understand the word, and from the red color of Jim's face, he

thought he did not want to. "I do not want a sedative," he repeated stubbornly.

★

The hour was very late when Chapel returned. He had been lying in bed for almost an hour, trying to sleep, but the forced inactivity of the day had left him with too much energy. When the buzzer sounded, he had just decided he would try meditating again.

He pressed the release without asking who was there, trying to control the rush of blood when it was not the captain or the doctor. He started to rise from the bed.

She was at his side before he could get past a sitting position. "You don't have to get up. This won't take a second." She brandished the hypo she carried.

"I do not want a sedative."

"I don't think that carries much weight. Leonard wants you to have it."

"It is not necessary." He didn't understand why he was arguing with her. If he allowed the injection, she would leave. She stood over him, maddeningly close. Every nerve in his body was screaming for him to touch her. Yet, illogically, he prolonged the agony by stubbornly refusing to allow her to do her job and leave.

"Mr. Spock, haven't you learned to just take Leonard's pills? You expend an awful lot of energy fighting the inevitable. And besides, it'll help you rest."

"I do not need chemicals to aid my sleep."

"Really?"

She said it so coolly, so knowingly. Dropping his head in shame to hide his furious blush, he felt her press the hypo against his arm. He didn't protest, and the thing hissed as she injected him. She straightened, obviously waiting for him to speak but he couldn't even meet her gaze.

Angry with herself for using her knowledge to bully him, she tried to make amends. "Mr. Spock, may I tell you something?" Taking his silence for permission, she continued. "Nocturnal emissions, none of this, is anything to be ashamed of."

Her bluntness was horrifying -- making even more heat rush to his face -- and strangely comforting. Jim and McCoy had tried to say the same things, but perhaps they had feared causing him discomfort. Jim had seemed so ill at ease, and McCoy could not stop grinning. It was difficult to feel that his new bodily reactions were natural when they seemed so embarrassed, or amused, when speaking of them.

Chapel was at a loss as to how to proceed. Although she longed to help, common sense told her to stop trying, but she thought she understood what he was going through. With anybody else she would have known exactly what to say, but this wasn't anybody else. He looked so much like a lost child that she wanted to put her arms around him and comfort him. Having gone this far, she couldn't do much more damage by plunging ahead. She sat down next to him and immediately popped back up again, realizing she was sitting on his bed. "You're making this so much harder on yourself. Did you read the tape?"

"Yes."

"Then you understand what's happening to your body. It is very natural and --"

"I am not a Human boy, Miss Chapel," he said tiredly. "It is not natural to me. I am in control. But I cannot control this." He stopped abruptly, aware that he had said more than he'd intended.

"Of course not," she agreed reasonably, as if she'd made her point. "There's no reason to be ashamed because you can't control a biological function of your -- or should I say Jim's? -- body."

"Jim can control it."

She smiled, glad he was still looking down so he didn't see her reaction. Now he even sounded like a petulant child. "He's had a little practice. Why don't you ask him? I'll guarantee he couldn't when he was a teenager."

He considered for a moment whether he could ask Jim such a question. Perhaps he could. The thought made him feel better. "Would you like to sit down?" he asked almost shyly. Perhaps he could ask her a question, too. He started to stand.

"Don't get up. I don't want to have to get you back to bed when that sedative takes effect." Her heart was pounding. He actually sounded as if he wanted her to stay. She forced herself to respond calmly. "I'll stay if you want to talk. Maybe you'd be more comfortable if I left?"

He sat down. The idea of her helping him to bed was not a displeasing one, and that disturbed him, but if she would answer him in the cool, easy manner she had exhibited so far .... "I would like to talk."

"Okay." She got a chair and pulled it near, but not too close. "For a minute. You need your rest."

In the ensuing silence, he realized he would have to ask her bluntly what he wanted to know. She was waiting. "The books you gave me explain the -- what is happening physically. But ... not how to ... deal with it. How do I -- control?"

In the semi-darkness, he could see her wrinkle her nose as she carefully considered her words. "You can't control nocturnal emissions. It's not conscious. It's just, kind of, your body letting off steam. We all went through it. Just try to imagine how bad it would be in the morning if your body didn't relieve the pressure."

He sat straighter and swallowed, his Vulcan control miraculously effective. He didn't know what to respond to first. He had not been referring to that specific symptom of his condition. He didn't have the nerve to be that blunt, and her use of the word 'we' aroused more than just his curiosity.

"I ... was not referring to that." He swallowed. Perhaps her bluntness was not the panacea he had hoped for. The temptation to question her about the 'we' was almost too much to bear. All that kept him from asking was the fear that she would be just as blunt in answering.

"I'm sorry. What were you referring to?" She seemed not at all concerned with what she'd said.

"I was speaking in general. You said you remembered your brothers' ..." he took a deep breath and forced himself to say the word, "puberty."

"Oh. You mean, how did they handle it? Badly, as most boys do." In the silence that followed she realized she still hadn't answered whatever it was he was asking. She thought carefully back over his question. "You mean, how did they control it?"

"Yes." The relief in his voice made her smile.

She considered. "Maybe you're still missing the point. Lack of control <u>is</u> the problem. You can't control ... lack of control." She could feel his disappointment at her answer. She tried again. "I remember them having some unusual ways of trying ...."

"Trying to what?"

"To control their reactions to girls."

His voice was carefully neutral, covering his anticipation. "Yes?"

Finally! Christine breathed a silent sigh of relief. Why hadn't he just asked that to begin with? "My youngest brother said he always thought of disgusting things." She paused, smiling with fond remembrance. "But he was always doing that anyway."

"Disgusting things?" he prompted. A very relaxed sensation was beginning to spread up his back into his shoulders. He tried to cover a stretch and allowed his posture to ease.

"Nasty things. Slimy things. My two oldest brothers tackled the problem in a completely different way. One of them --" She stopped abruptly, looking a little abashed. "No, I can't tell you that."

She watched him roll his shoulders again. The sedative was beginning to take effect. "Maybe I could find a tape about slimy things," she suggested teasingly.

She laughed softly at the indignant look he gave her, straightening into that proper Vulcan posture. "Okay. Just a suggestion." She relaxed back, beginning to enjoy herself. She stretched her legs out in front of her, watching with delight

the way his eyes took in the movement, then felt bad for teasing him. He was trusting her, letting down his guard. She straightened, promising herself she wouldn't take advantage, no matter how tempting it was. "Maybe my oldest brother's solution will help. He said he used computer problems."

"Computer problems?"

"Um-hm. Anything with a progression that kept his mind following along. Thinking 'The sky is blue' wouldn't help, because once the thought ends, you go right back to the ... problem. But a computer problem leads your mind away. And keeps it away."

"That is logical." Perhaps a computer problem would stop him from thinking how long her legs were. But mathematical problems had not helped. He had tried that already. He felt tired.

"Getting tired?" she asked, as if she were reading his mind. She got up and put the chair back in its place. "You can think about it tomorrow. Good night." She smiled and was gone.

"Good night," he responded, searching his sluggish mind for something to banish the scent of her from the air.

★

Jim Kirk stopped himself from tapping his feet on the floor for the third time. He was about ready to call it an evening.

Spock was sitting with his fingers steepled, staring into space with a thoughtful look on his face. He had turned down an offer of chess, saying he feared he could not concentrate enough to play, but he was concentrating on something easily enough. He hadn't spoken in several minutes.

Kirk was too full of nervous energy to sit still much longer. He almost wished he hadn't come by tonight, but McCoy was in the lab working and he hadn't wanted Spock to spend the entire day without some company.

Truth was, he was feeling guilty. He hadn't had anything to do with the transfer. Hell, he didn't even know what had caused it to happen. But he was responsible. He was responsible for all his people, and the fact that the discomfort Spock was experiencing originated from his body, so to speak, made the situation even worse. The early stages of his puberty were a painful, fumbling, embarrassed memory. That was before an older woman had, as Bones would say, 'taken him in hand.' His lack of response to a normally arousing memory made him even more irritable, especially considering his eager response to Uhura earlier in the day. This hit and miss hard-on was more irritating than total lack of arousal.

He tapped his hands on his thighs, then forced himself to stop. He couldn't help wondering if Spock was experiencing puberty in general, or <u>his</u> puberty.

"Jim?" Spock turned toward him, dropping his hands.

Something about Spock's composure set off a mental alarm. He had the feeling he was about to wish he'd left when he had the chance. "Yes?"

"I have a question."

Kirk cleared his throat. "Yes?"

"I have found it disturbing to speak to you about what has happened. Why do you think I would be more comfortable speaking about this to someone with whom I would not ordinarily be comfortable?"

His relief at not being asked some probing personal question made him grin. "Try that again?"

"Why do you think I feel more comfortable speaking with someone other than you about this?"

"Who is this mystery person you normally wouldn't feel comfortable with?" Kirk immediately realized he'd said the wrong thing.

Spock flushed and wouldn't meet his gaze. "Miss Chapel." He said it so quietly Kirk almost didn't hear, then continued more firmly, "She -- answered a question last night. It was very strange. I was disturbed by her presence, but not about asking her about this."

Kirk straightened in his chair. That nasty little guilt feeling was back. These were his reactions Spock was struggling to understand. He forced himself to respond without embarrassment. "Maybe it's because she's not so involved."

"She has more objectivity?" Spock had the feeling that Kirk was not speaking only of Chapel.

"More than me, anyway." He forced himself to continue, leaning forward, elbows on his knees. "I have to confess that it's not easy to talk about to you because it's -- it's so personal. You're the one going through this, but they're my reactions. I guess I feel a little ... guilty."

"That is illogical, but I understand." Perhaps that discomfort explained why it had not been easier to talk to Jim. Usually he could speak with him when he would not have dreamed of opening up to someone else. The hesitation between them was disconcerting.

"Do you?" Kirk felt reprieved when Spock nodded, his face retreating into thoughtfulness again. The temptation to ask what question Chapel had answered was too much. "What did she tell you?"

Spock looked away. "She told me how her brothers controlled their ... reactions."

"Oh. Did it help?"

Spock stared at a spot on the wall. "No."

Kirk stared at the opposite wall. "Well, that's ... normal. I mean, I never met anybody who had a foolproof system."

"Jim ...." Spock looked at him, his face easily two shades darker than normal. "How --? What --? What was your system?"

Kirk laughed. "I don't think it'll help you, Spock."

"You do not have to answer. I did not mean to pry."

"It's not that. It's just that, I always figured if something makes you uncomfortable, expose yourself to it as much as possible. Figuratively speaking, of course."

Spock was watching him again.

"See, constant exposure deadens you. If you spend as much time with women as possible ... you kind of get your enthusiasm ... numbed." Kirk saw no need to tell him that it only worked in theory. He already looked scandalized enough.

"Maybe you could spend the day at the pool? Even if it doesn't help, you'll find it makes you very popular with the ladies." Jim grinned as Spock's eyebrows threatened to climb off his face. "It was just an idea." He laughed softly as he turned away from him again, then sobered when he realized that Spock had really been serious. Now was the time to stop acting like a juvenile and make up for ... for his body's over-active libido.

He leaned forward earnestly. "Look, Spock, I know this is har- ... difficult. But honestly, there aren't any easy answers."

Spock gripped the sides of his chair. "There must be something .... Human males do not lock themselves away."

Kirk sighed. Maybe he should have let McCoy tell him that morning in Sickbay. "There's one thing, well, two things, that'll help. But you aren't going to like them any better than the pool."

Spock turned toward him with such a hopeful expression that Kirk had to continue without embarrassment. "A woman. Or --"

"What?"

He ordered himself not to blush. "You can ask a woman to ... help you. Or you can masturbate. It's the only way to relieve the ... pressure.

"Sorry. I told you that you wouldn't like it." Kirk struggled not to laugh at the horror on Spock's face.

"Thank you for being ... honest." Spock withdrew again, staring off into space until Kirk rose to pace. Then he watched his commanding officer's nervous striding, his eyes narrowing as he watched the way Kirk tapped his leg as he went back and forth.

★

Spock paced, back and forth, back and forth, like something caged, impatient for Christine to arrive. He had avoided the obvious solution all day, grabbing at any other possibility, then discarding it, until he was mentally exhausted.

Jim would be incapacitated, for perhaps only a couple of days until the transference wore off, or perhaps the pon farr would run the usual course and last the ten days to two weeks normal for a Vulcan. If so, perhaps he would have Jim's sex drive for the remaining time.

Regardless of the length of time involved, the ship would be his responsibility ... but he could not work in any capacity in this condition. Today had shown him that. His day on the bridge had been a nightmare, his body out of control. Christine's computer solution had been no help at all, and he did not think there was enough time for Jim's method of anesthetization to ever work. That left only one other course of action.

His first duty was his command. He must remember that. His first duty --

The buzzer sounded. His body reacted immediately, the thread of eagerness running beneath his logical attempts to solve this surprising him. He schooled his face carefully, presenting no indication of his turmoil to her.

She put his supper tray down. "Doing okay today?"

"I -- I wish to speak to you about that."

She looked at him closer. He seemed both nervous and composed at the same time, if such a combination was possible.

"I cannot -- I find --" He closed his eyes. The words had seemed so obvious before, when he had decided what to do. Now they had left him.

She was watching him quizzically, waiting.

In a swift movement he had her in his arms, pressing against her, not trying to control his need, nor even conceal it. His mouth found hers and claimed it, ignoring her sound of surprise and the tensing of her muscles.

Christine's first thought was, idiotically, *Now I know why women swoon in all those old novels.* His mouth was invading hers, and she could feel the heat from his hardness rubbing against her stomach.

He felt her mold her body to his, all the resistance draining out, responding to his instinctive blandishments, then she was tense again and pulling away. The change was so abrupt that she was out of his grasp before he could stop her, backing away from him until she was stopped by the door, shaking her head. "No. No, Spock."

He stood close, almost touching her. Now he would have to find the words. He tried to sound reasonable. "I need your help. I would not ask if there was only the discomfort, if I could stay here ... but now I cannot. Jim is ... will be unable to command. I will have to assume the responsibility."

"I don't understand. What's wrong with the captain?"

He stared at a spot on the door over her shoulder, too shamed by what he must reveal to look at her. He shivered. This was what he had dreaded. If only she had accepted his need as simple desire.

She tensed as he leaned towards her, hands coming up to push him away, and he swayed back, asking hoarsely, "You understand ... pon farr?"

She nodded, and said "Yes," in a small voice, her eyes searching his averted face.

"Jim -- the symptoms ..."

"You mean the captain is -- but Leonard didn't say anything --"

"The doctor does not know. Jim is only beginning to suspect. Tonight ... or tomorrow, he will be forced to ...." He had told Jim that he understood his guilty feelings, but only now did he really understand, when he was finally faced with what Jim would suffer because of his Vulcan heritage.

"How can you be so sure?"

He looked at her, mutely begging for her understanding. He could not explain further.

She gave in to the expression on his face. "Okay, you're sure. But that doesn't explain --"

"The signals we've intercepted from the Neutral Zone make it impossible for the Enterprise to be without both senior officers ... and the most experienced communications officer."

Christine put her hand to her forehead. "Wait. This is getting more complicated every time you open your mouth. How does Uhura fit into this?" She knew, even as she said the words, even before he answered.

"Jim will require ...." His voice died away. He felt as if he were betraying a confidence, even though it was something he had not actually been told. "He is drawn to her. She will be the one who must .... The ship cannot be without all three of us. It is my duty, but I cannot function in this condition. Every time a woman comes near me ...." His voice died away again. At last it was all said, but she had gone so still.

Her face was expressionless as she said coldly, "Then ask one of them to help. I don't fuck in the line of duty, sir." She pushed against him so viciously that he stepped back, allowing her to turn away.

Obviously he had spoken clumsily. He tried again, remembering her fragile Human needs this time. "I do not want one of them," he said humbly.

His words stopped her hand in mid-motion, reaching for the door release. "Leonard can relieve you. Scotty can handle things."

"It is my responsibility," he said stubbornly. "The captain will expect me to assume command, and to be there to deal with any Romulan threat. I cannot function in this condition. Jim said --" A picture of Jim, already beginning to show the effects of his condition, flashed into his mind. Jim, pushing aside his own nervousness and embarrassment to tell him honestly his options for relieving the pressure. "It is the only logical solution."

"And what will you think of your logical solution next week?" She clenched her fists. "How will you react to me when this is all over?"

His fingertips brushed her neck and traced the line of her shoulder. He knew what she wanted to hear, but the one thing that had not failed him through all this was his honesty, and he admitted to himself that she might be right. "There is no other way." He reached over her shoulder and locked the door. Gently he pulled her back into the room and into his arms.

She didn't resist his embrace, looking up into his face. "I can't. You know that if it was any other time, I'd do anything, but I do have a few morals. I can't take advantage of ... this situation any more than you could. Even if I would ... I don't think I have the courage, knowing how you'd look at me next week."

The remark about taking advantage stung. He knew he was taking advantage of her emotions, and he reminded himself of his duty. "There is no other way," he whispered, lowering his lips to hers.

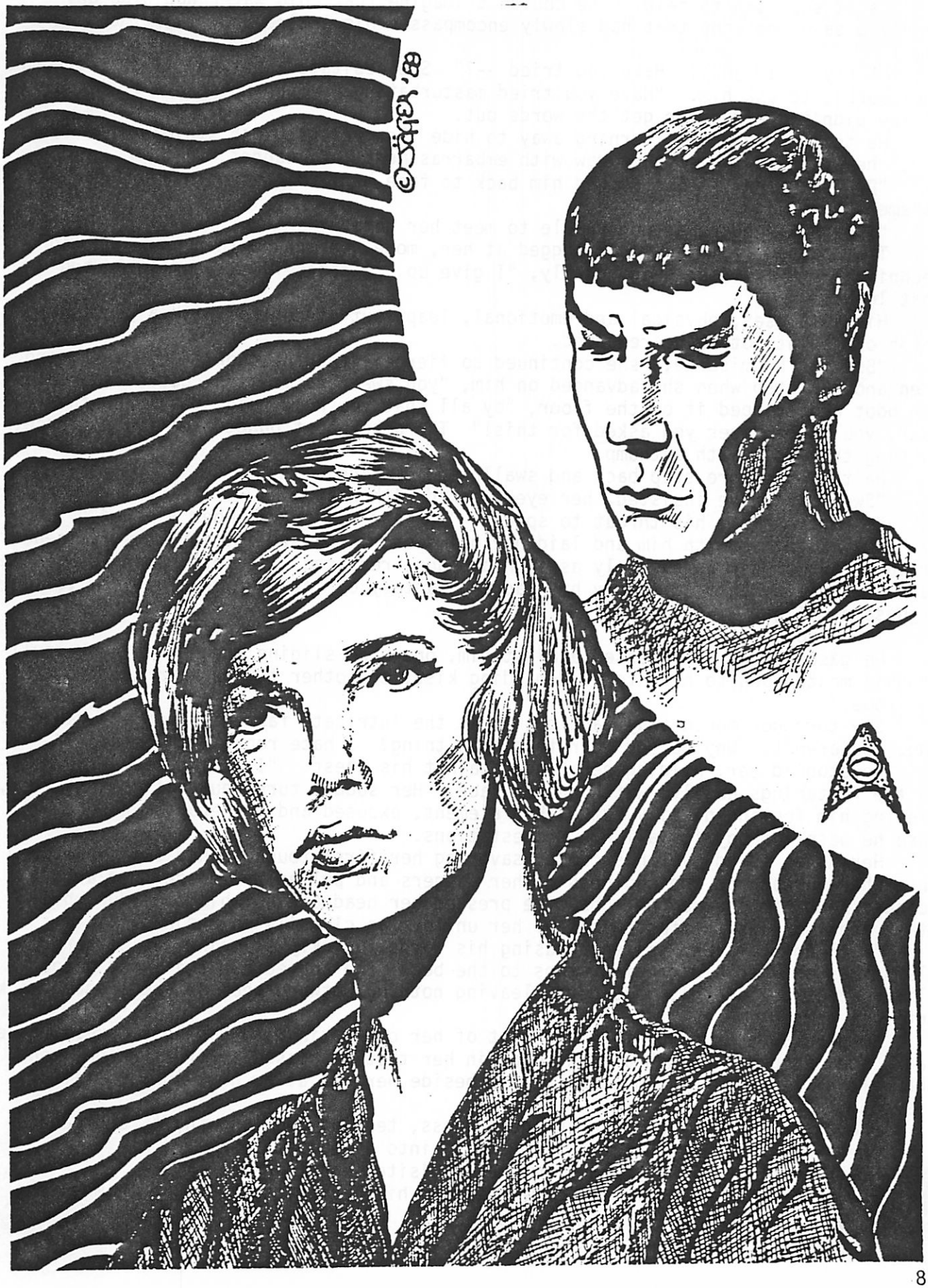
She whimpered softly against his mouth. How was she supposed to resist this -- his soft pleas, his mouth, his hands beginning to roam over her back? How would it feel to have those hands all over her body, without the impeding cloth of her uniform? He was edging her slowly toward the bed, not lessening the attack on her senses.

She pulled away reluctantly, pushing him away and holding him at arm's length. "There has to be another way."

He looked at her silently, stiffly. He had not considered that she might say no.

"Cold showers, maybe?" She tried to sound flippant as she searched for something, anything to keep her from doing what her entire body was screaming for her to do.

He sighed tiredly. "I do not understand this reference. McCoy also mentioned



it. Is it supposed to help?" He couldn't imagine that cold water would do anything to ease the ache that had slowly encompassed his entire body over the past days.

"Sorry. Bad joke. Have you tried --?" She hesitated, not at all sure she had the courage to ask him. "Have you tried masturbating?" She spoke in a rush, afraid if she didn't she'd never get the words out.

He took a step back, turning away to hide the furious blush staining his face. "No," he whispered, his voice raw with embarrassment. "I cannot."

"Don't do that." She turned him back to face her. "It is nothing to be ashamed of."

"I cannot," he repeated, unable to meet her gaze.

That pained, fumbling look tugged at her, more convincing than any seduction technique. "Okay," she said huskily, "I give up. I can't fight your logic and that look."

His responses, physical and emotional, leapt out of control with a peculiar throb of joy at not being rejected.

"But you promise me," she continued so fiercely that he took a step back, and then another step when she advanced on him, "you swear to me," she paused to remove one boot and dropped it on the floor, "by all that you hold holy, that when this is over, you'll remember you asked for this!" The other boot punctuated the sentence, hitting the floor with a thump.

He took one more step back and swallowed, nodding.

"Swear it!" she insisted, her eyes locked with his.

He had to clear his throat to speak. "I swear ... to remember I asked."

She caught up with him and laid her palms on his chest, smiling, the fierceness draining out of her as suddenly as it had begun, replaced with soft humor and gentleness. "Every woman over thirty has had the fantasy of introducing a boy to ... sex. I guess now I get my chance."

"I am not a boy."

He gasped when she pressed against him, one hand sliding around his neck, pulling his mouth down to hers for a demanding kiss, the other toying with the front of his robe.

She tore her mouth away, and pulled at the intricate fastenings on the garment. "No, you aren't. Why do you wear this damn thing? I hate robes with buttons."

He stopped her, holding her hands against his chest. "I will do it." He worked the fastenings easily, watching her face. Her sudden turnabout was breathtaking, leaving him feeling dizzily out of his element, exposed and vulnerable, not at all sure he wasn't a boy for all his protestations.

Her hands moved over his chest, savoring her first touch of his skin. He drew in a sharp breath at the coolness of her fingers and pulled her close, her arms going around him inside the robe. He pressed her head against his shoulder, his other hand working the fastenings of her uniform as clumsily as she had his.

"I'll do it." She smiled at using his words, quickly slipping out of her clothes as she led him the few steps to the bed. She turned out the light before sliding the robe off his shoulders, leaving nothing between them as she stepped back into his arms.

He gave another gasp at the contact of her cool skin with his heat, pressing her back onto the bed, in such a rush to be in her that he hissed in frustration when she held him away, insisting that he lie beside her and allow her slow perusal of his body.

She stroked him with enflaming gentleness, teasing the long shaft, and caressing lower where he was taut, drawn up almost into his body.

He groaned, nearly in pain from the exquisite sensations.

She kissed her way down his body, hearing his harsh intake of breath when she touched the overheated skin with her tongue.

"That is not ... necessary." He pressed her head toward him even as he managed to gasp the words.

The air from her soft laugh caressed him. "For which one of us?"

He endured her oral ministrations only a minute, then pulled her away, gentleness forgotten in his urgency, forcing her onto her back, pushing into her, frantic to reach the release he could sense was near. She opened herself to him, giving in to his hurried demands.

He pressed his face into the pillow and let her take his full weight as he thrust relentlessly, his entire awareness concentrated on hurling himself into orgasm.

Christine rocked under his frenzied assault, knowing he couldn't last much longer and accepting his need to be finished quickly. The exquisite, stretching friction was promise enough for later. She massaged the knotted muscles across his shoulders, whispering, "Relax. Just relax and let it happen."

He obeyed, her words just barely registering in his fevered brain. The moment he eased the tension from his muscles, he exploded, the pleasure that was so near pain blanking his senses, tearing a gutteral cry from his throat.

"Better?" she asked tenderly, stroking his sweaty back as he collapsed across her, panting, weak.

"Yes." With the ache gone, his body was his own again and not some alien morass of needs. He could concentrate without dividing his attention, and the wash of embarrassment at his lack of control wrenched a small sound from him. He rolled away from her quickly, saying stiffly, "I am too heavy," when she protested.

He reached for the blanket, shivering, covering his nakedness, and turned on his side, his back to her. He couldn't bear what he might find in her face. What must she think of his shameful inability to control?

He twisted the fluffy cloth in his fists, pressing it under his chin, and concentrated on bringing his body back under control. His heart rate was still accelerated from the orgasm, muscles trembling from exertion. His heart responded to his commands, but the trembling persisted.

In the silence, Christine could feel his suffering as plainly as if he had been crying it aloud. She moved over against him, fitting herself to his back and dropping one arm over his body, ignoring his tensing at her touch.

Her unspoken acceptance was soothing, and he began to relax, pushing away thoughts that interfered with his enjoyment of finally being free of the ache in his groin. It even felt nice when she slipped her hand under his arm and rubbed his chest.

He was pleasantly warm and drowsy as she continued the light circular movements down his stomach. Her hand moved back up his chest, and down again, then further down, brushing his flaccid organ. The touch startled him, making him tense, drowsiness forgotten.

Christine backed off, moving back up his stomach until he relaxed, then touched him again, thrilling when he stirred under her hand.

Her touch awakened a soft throb, and he firmly took her hand and placed it on his stomach. He could not bring himself to push her away even though her touch was making him aware of her cool breasts against his back. She laughed softly and began kissing his shoulder and neck, her tongue flicking his ear, not moving her hand from where he'd placed it.

Now it didn't matter. The idea had been planted in his head, and her teasing nibbling was doing the rest. He was beginning to swell. He cleared his throat, straightening his back in an effort to get away from the hard nipples grazing his skin.

"Christine, do not."

The tip of her tongue found the tip of his ear.

"Do not --"

Her hand had begun that circular motion again across his abdomen, and encoun-

tered the head of his erection standing up hard and ready. She laughed in delight and her fingers encircled him. "Next time, if you don't want me to find this, you'd better move my hand farther away."

He stopped her stroking. "You must not. I will --"

"You'll what?" She tugged on his shoulder, smiling when he rolled over with only a show of resistance. "You'll what?" she persisted, pushing the blanket off him, her mouth brushing his lips as her hand found him again.

He shuddered, eyes closing as he stopped resisting her and the expanding desire in himself. "I need."

Her mouth moved lower, teasing his nipples. "Not yet, you don't," she promised wickedly, "but you will." She straddled him, moving down his body, pressing his legs between hers. She opened her mouth and felt the coppery heat of his sex slide across her tongue. She heard him gasp as he lifted his hips toward her in surrender, and an answering heat blossomed through her.

He lifted his head to watch her take him, her hand releasing its grip on the base of his shaft only when her body met it. She braced her hands on his chest, fingering his hard nipples, and began to move, taking possession of his body, using him for her pleasure. She found a movement that made her cry out with delight, and rode him until she exploded, losing the rhythm but not stopping.

Her excitement both fed his own, and controlled it. He had never been compelled by another's passion, powerless to do more than be taken by the extraordinary sensations. He writhed underneath her, rocking to the rhythm she established, reaching blindly to cup her breasts, to run his hands down her thighs, feeling the bunching of the muscles. He moved sleekly in her, applying pressure exactly where she wanted as she guided him, her agitated movements signalling another climax, then another.

Her exultation was contagious. Now he understood her promise. His need before was nothing compared to this. He grasped her hips, thrusting up into her, all his awareness tunneled onto that long length of him that was clasped in her straining coolness. He gave a strangled shout as his muscles contracted, spasmed with the sweet intensity of his release.

His hot liquid rushed into her, and she collapsed into his arms, twitching, so sensitized that she knew she would come again just from his slowed rocking. Her body felt like one enormous, exposed nerve ending. "Not again. You'll kill me," she moaned as he dug his fingers in her buttocks and moved her back and forth on his spent, softening shaft, then sobbed into his shoulder as the tremors rippled through her again.

He seemed content to rest with her across him, breath slowly returning to normal, hands still on her bottom. She hated to move, but he was like a furnace. Her hair was wet with sweat and her whole body was sticky with it, and staying on him was making it worse. She rolled away reluctantly, finding the heated air only a little cooler.

"That's a thousand times better than a cold shower." She ran her fingers along his lean ribs. His skin was wet, too.

He flinched at her tickling touch but did not turn away. "Infinitely," he answered, his voice dry but with just a touch of awe and amusement.

She smiled. She could just see that eyebrow climbing.

"Christine ..." he said somberly, tentatively, turning on his side to face her. One did not thank logic, but Humans placed such a premium on doing so. The first time was logical, but what had just happened, was ... beyond his experience. "Thank you."

"Anytime," she mumbled, sleepiness blurring her normally light tone, and turned on her side away from him, leaving him wondering why she always said that.

He slept, and dreamed of a dark-haired, dark-eyed yeoman who worked on the bridge, but when she touched him, it was Christine's cool hands he felt. When he reached she disappeared, leaving him hot and frustrated.

He woke sticky with perspiration, finding that the dream was just that. There

was no pressure, no longing. For the first time in four days, he was sated.

★

A marvelous tingling through her body woke Christine. She stretched sensuously before remembering where she was and froze, opening her eyes. He was lying on his side against her, and the sensations making her shiver were unmistakably caused by his fingertips exploring her body.

He stopped, hand hanging cetimeters above her abdomen, waiting for her response, brown eyes unsure.

She finished her slow stretch, never breaking the eye contact, and covered his hand with hers, guiding it back to her body, leading his long fingers down. Her legs parted, welcoming his tentative caresses, craving his touch, gasping when his fingers entered her, hearing his answering response when he encountered the slick coolness.

He was still, fighting for control. His need was pounding at him, making him want to take her roughly, quickly.

She took his hand and moved it higher, showing him where to touch her, crying out with pleasure when he rubbed the hard button. Destracted from his own desires, he experimented, sliding his fingers back into her, using his thumb where they had been.

The effect was more than he'd expected. She tensed in climax, pressing her face against his shoulder to muffle her moans, and closed her legs, trapping his hand. He watched with astonishment as she tensed and twisted, then slowly went limp.

She reached for him, pressing her lips to his as he slid onto her, into her. They rocked, undulating against each other, mouths locked together as their bodies were.

He had expected it to be like last night, if not with the urgency of the first time, at least with the wildness of what his mind had already categorized as Christine's passion. He was not disappointed with the easy, but irresistible climb to ecstasy that happened instead. Their legs tangled together as they rolled back and forth across the bed, rocking, twisting against each other, not moving far enough apart for him to thrust, Christine floating into another orgasm only seconds after his surging release.

★

McCoy brought his supper. "I thought you probably wouldn't be up to ... ah, be interested in going to mess."

Spock acknowledged the tray with a nod, ignoring the grin which told him that, once again, he'd missed something. "How is Jim?"

McCoy shrugged. "I haven't heard anything. In this case, I figure no news is good news."

They looked at each other, both seeing the haggard tiredness in the other's face. "Chapel says you're doing okay. Not even fighting the sedative."

Spock had to dig his nails into his palm to keep from asking where she was. He wanted her here now. He had spent the day half-heartedly trying to devise an inconspicuous way to schedule an all-male bridge crew until this was over, disturbed with the lack of sincerity in his efforts even as his body raged out of control.

"I am ... controlling the discomfort." The statement was not exactly a lie. "I would like to meditate now, if you do not mind. It has been a trying day."

McCoy nodded and said tiredly, "I need to get back to the lab. I keep hoping I'll at least figure out how the implants work." He left without protest, grinning when he noticed much later that he had been subtly dismissed.

★

Spock's chest throbbed with apprehension and anticipation when Christine entered. There was no way to pretend he was reluctant, and no way not to feel embarrassed with his eagerness.

She propped comfortably just inches from him, tossing a wad of blue cloth onto the console top, and stared at the tips of her boots. "Hi," she said, finally looking at him directly.

He forced himself to be as direct, amazed and a little irritated at the way Humans could overreact irrationally in some situations, and then underreact in others, all with total unpredictability. "Hello."

She smiled, finally showing him that she was indulging in another irritating Human habit -- teasing.

He looked away, blushing, at a loss for words, reaching to finger the soft silk that had slowly come unrolled.

"My robe," she supplied in a shy voice. "Maybe it was presumptuous. I ... wasn't sure if you'd want me ... to stay."

He swallowed, hunching his shoulders, reluctantly withdrawing his hand from the blue material that was exactly the color of her eyes, and almost as soft as her skin.

He looked up at her, and she smiled at that lost little boy look. He really was an innocent in some ways. The corruption she was contemplating made her smile grow broader. "I always take silence to mean yes."

"Yes," he admitted softly, huskily, standing, pulling her into his arms. Letting his urgency show was preferable to sitting there under her scrutiny. At least this way he could turn out the lights.

Christine made a soft appreciative sound, molding her tall body to his, sliding her arms around his neck. She felt his fingers at the fastenings of her uniform, opening it with ease this time. "Where have you been practicing?"

The indignant look on his face made her laugh and pull his head down to hers for a fierce kiss, saying, "Your innocence is very sexy."

His embarrassment was forgotten at her response. He released her reluctantly when she said, "Why don't I go change into something more comfortable?" The last was said coyly, but he obviously didn't understand the reference. Laughing and shaking her head, she said, "I'll be back in a minute. Don't lose my place."

It was longer than a minute, but he needed the time to settle the churning in his stomach. She kept throwing him off guard. There was such variation, not just in the method of expressing passion, but also in the ... experiencing of it. There was urgency, and madness, and effortlessness, and now laughter. The variety was difficult to assimilate. One moment she aroused him to a fever pitch, the next she laughed at him, and it all seemed the same to her.

She came out wearing the robe, her hair down and pulled back out of the way. She turned the lights down, then stood still for his inspection of the neat plait in her hair, fingering the fabric of his bathrobe. "I haven't seen you wear this before."

He ducked his head and said shyly, "You said you did not like robes with buttons."

She laughed softly. "I appreciate the thought." She hooked her fingers in the tie and pulled. "But you aren't going to be wearing it long enough to make a difference."

Opening her robe, she moved in against him, somehow managing to let her robe drop and slide his off at the same time, urging him toward the bed. "Come here. There's something I want to ask you."

They fell to the bed, grappling erotically, playfully, Spock's timidity forgotten as he eagerly pressed against her, running his hands over her.

"Wait," Christine protested breathlessly as his fingers aroused her with expert ease. "Wait."

She pressed him onto his back, laughing at his protests. She lay on her side against him and let her fingertips dance over his chest, toying with his hard nipples, trailing down his torso. "I want you to tell me something."

His eyes flickered between her hand and her eyes. What new game was this?

"What?"

Her fingers traced the underside of his hard shaft, then encircled it, making him relax back with a sigh, losing his sense of urgency.

He forgot about her question as she stroked gently, until she said, "Why can't you do this?"

"What?" He knew exactly to what she was referring, but he didn't want to think about it.

Her fingers tightened delightfully, enticing a groan from him. "Doesn't it feel good?"

"Yes," he gasped. "Yes."

"Then why can't you do it?"

His breathing was quickly becoming irregular, his hips beginning to lift toward her hand. "I cannot."

She stopped, removing her hand, laughing at him when he moaned in protest and guided it back. She caught his hand and put it on himself, wrapping her fingers around his so that she guided his hand in the same motion she had been using, making him stroke himself.

"No," he whispered softly, but did not stop.

"Why not?" She slithered down his body, taking him in her mouth, her hand not slowing the insistent pumping. "Why not?"

He made a half-attempt at pulling his hand away, in an agony of indecision. His body did not care how, it only craved release, but the thrill of the forbidden sensations did not quite overpower his embarrassment, nor his sense of the illogic of such an act.

His excitement made the debate irrelevant. His orgasm was on him so quickly there was no time to care how, no time to do more than groan a warning that, instead of making her pull away, encouraged her to take more of him into her mouth, her soft sound of appreciation at the taste and feel of his eruption just barely registering among his own moans.

He pulled his hand away, his embarrassment flooding back the moment his desire was quenched.

Christine seemed not to notice until he averted his face when she moved up even with him on the bed. "Don't," she said softly, lying across his chest and turning his face with fingers gently pressing along his jawline.

He refused to meet her eyes. "It is ... not logical. It serves no purpose."

She laughed. "Its 'purpose' is pleasure. Sex isn't supposed to be logical, just enjoyable."

Her hand glided down his abdomen, finding him still half-erect, teasingly bringing him back to full hardness as she laughed at the surprised sound he made. "You know, you have a Human's sex drive. It seems to me that the logical thing to do would be to treat it as a Human would and stop worrying about whether what your body wants is logical."

"It is not ethical for you to use my logic against me," he told her, his fingers beginning to return her teasing explorations. "What would a Human do now?"

She rolled onto her back, urging him up over her. "Take me," she said in that throaty voice she'd used before. "Take me now."

What would Jim do now? His body already knew, but it took a moment for his mind to catch up. He hung there over her, teasing her unknowingly as he carefully considered what she'd shown him already, what he knew from experiences before her. He watched her twist beneath him, wondering as he slowly took her if that was how he'd looked to her the night before. He moved with precise, rhythmic strokes, refusing to vary the tempo even though her fingers clamped down on him in her need.

"Please." She tried to move faster beneath him and he lowered himself onto her, using his weight to restrict her frenzied thrusting. "You're killing me!"

"Illogical, Christine," he murmured in her ear, his voice as close to laughter as she'd ever heard it. "If that were true, I would have killed you last night."

laughing protests that his food would get cold. Surely he wouldn't have needed her so soon again.

She reached out a hand for him. His side of the bed was empty and cold, as if he'd been gone a while. She crawled across it and checked the time. Morning. Her eyes searched the quarters and found him, sitting, fingers steepled in front of his face, obviously deep in meditation.

She lay back, her chest suddenly constricted painfully. He hadn't needed her in the middle of the night. And now he was meditating, <u>really</u> meditating, not attempting as he had been doing. It was over.

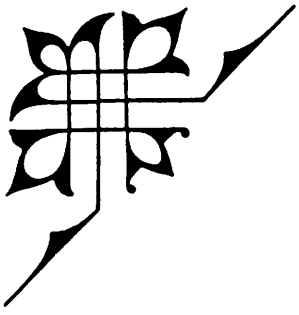
She had been preparing for this, but the realization still hurt. Now they went back to ... what? She sighed and rubbed her face. Now she went back to quarters that were going to seem cold after the heat of his, and a bed that was going to seem cold after the heat of him. It didn't matter. The one thing she'd promised herself fiercely was that she was going to do this with class. No matter what happened, he was never going to see anything in her that would cause him discomfort.

She found her robe on the floor beside the bed, then searched for her clothes. This had to happen, not the night she'd stacked her things neatly in the bathroom, but when he'd stripped her, tossing clothing aside in haste.

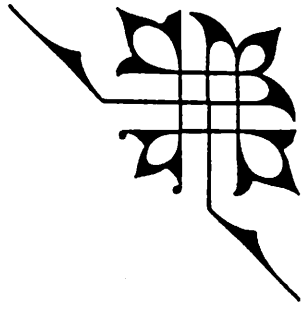
Her quiet movements distracted him, bringing him out of the meditation. He stayed where he was, eyes closed, forehead resting on his fingers, knowing she would not know he was aware of her.

His body was his own again, calm and familiar, devoid of the grinding pressure. In retrospect, he could not find fault with his logic, except had he known it would end now, it would probably have been harmless to relenquish command to Mr. Scott. Decisions had to be made with the information at hand. But not all that had happened could be neatly filed away under the heading of logic.

She came out of the bathroom, interrupting his reverie. He froze, waiting, but she did not approach him. He remained hidden behind his facade of meditation, not responding when she whispered "Good-bye," just before walking out the door, leaving him alone, her scent hanging in the air.

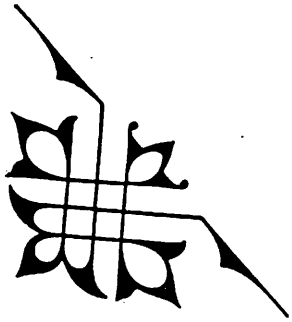


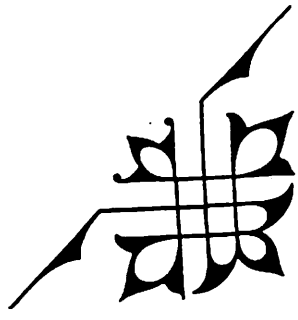
SPOCK



Dumbfounded, I stare at your back
As you bend to pull on your boots.
I never dreamed it could be like this --
Not passionate lovemaking,
But red animal lust,
Hungering in the night for flesh
While hot jungle noises play background music.
You are no lover for a trembling virgin,
And I am certainly no virgin,
But I blush to remember the things we did:
Me as hot as any bitch in heat,
Whimpering, begging,
Glorying in my total abandonment
To unbridled savage passion.
And yet, our joining was more than that,
Your mind to mine,
Lifting me, guiding me
To a union so complete that the sweet afterglow
Will never fade.
For I will always carry a part of you with me,
And you will always have a part of me.
You sense my thoughts an turn,
Smiling that tender smile that no one else will ever see.

-- Deborah Goby
(c) 1988





"The Switch"
Epilogue

by Ann Zewen and Linda Pugh Baker

Nyota Uhura lay on her bunk, dreamily humming along with the soft melody playing on her cabin's music center. Eyes closed, a gentle smile on her lips, she absent-mindedly lifted one hand to brush the fingers across first her cheek and then the full lips. Just that slight touch of her own body -- along with the memories playing back in her mind -- was enough to quicken her heartbeat and deepen her breathing. "Jim." The name was little more than a sigh. But there was no answer, and she ached with longing to feel his presence by her side once again, wondering if she ever would, or if the memory of the past few days would fade in time until she began to believe it had all been a dream. For now, though, she knew it was no illusion, but a reality so compelling she doubted she would ever experience anything to equal it again in her life.

Her bittersweet thoughts were interrupted by the sound of the buzzer. She opened her eyes slowly and turned her head just as languorously toward the doorway, wondering who it could be. Too tired to move, she called out for her visitor to enter, not really caring who it might be, knowing it couldn't be the one person she would like to see. He must be even more exhausted than she was.

"Ny?" It was Chris, standing hesitantly on the threshold, as though unsure whether to enter.

"C'mon in." She made a heroic effort to rise from the bed, but only partly succeeded, propping herself against a pile of pillows behind her. "Did you need something?"

"I just wondered how you were doing."

Uhura grinned contentedly as her blonde friend blushed furiously. "Me? I'm great ... just a little tired." She paused. "How did you know?" The two women were close friends and confidantes, but there had been no time to tell Chris about her activities of the past few days. Leonard must have told her. She blushed a little herself, thankful that her dark skin hid the color.

"I ...." Chris seemed strangely reluctant to discuss the matter, which didn't make any sense at all. Why would <u>she</u> be embarrassed, just because McCoy had revealed such an intimate detail to her? Watching her friend, Uhura sensed that this was more than mere embarrassment.

"What's the matter, Chris?" The question was gentle.

"I ...." The nurse tried again, still hesitating, then decided to go ahead and tell her what she had come to say. She desperately wanted her friend's advice. "Spock told me."

Uhura's dark eyes widened in surprise. Spock? Obviously the Vulcan knew what was going on, but to tell Chris was unthinkable. She couldn't believe he could bring himself to discuss such a very personal matter, and with Christine Chapel, of all people. He knew how she felt about him.

"Oh. Well, don't worry. I'm fine. Really, I am." She gave her friend a blinding smile, then confided. "Why wouldn't I be? I've just had two and a half days of the most exciting, wonderful, loving sex I could ever imagine. Like I said, I'm a

bit tired -- who wouldn't be? But otherwise I feel absolutely fantastic, like I'm floating on air, and I don't ever want to come down."

Chapel stared at her friend with wide blue eyes. Nyota had always been very open with her friend, never hesitating to divulge the most intimate details of her life, but she had never seen her quite this... radiant before. She was positively glowing with happiness and a relaxed, satisfied contentment. Either Jim Kirk was one hell of a good lover, or Ny was really in love this time -- maybe both.

"That good, huh?" Chapel couldn't resist teasing her friend a little.

"That good." A simple statement, with a wealth of meaning.

"No regrets?"

"None."

Chapel turned away from her friend and paced across the room. "Ny?" she began, hesitant again, then asked the question she was dying to know, "Would you ... do it again?" Her voice had dropped almost to a whisper at the end.

"Again?" She paused for several moments, as though seriously considering the question, then flashed that blinding smile again. "In a minute ... if he asked."

"And if he doesn't?"

A little of the sunlight seemed to fade from her eyes, but she met Chapel's without hesitation. "Then I'll just have to live with my memories. He's still my commanding officer, Chris. I can't go chasing after him like a love-sick puppy. He's got to make the first move." Suddenly she smiled again. "But when he does ...." When, not if.

She narrowed her eyes as she watched Chapel pacing around the room, then asked again, "What's the matter?"

Finally Chapel settled at the foot of the bed, sitting cross-legged, with a painfully vulnerable expression on her face. "Ny." She hesitated again for a few seconds, then plunged in. "While you were .... While the captain was ... er ... 'incapacitated' ...." Uhura grinned wickedly at the obvious quote, then sobered as Chapel gave her a stern look, then continued, " ... Spock told me ... asked me ...."

"C'mon, Chris. Just tell me." The tone of her voice was kind.

"He said ... he said one of them had to be on the bridge, because of the Romulans, and that Jim couldn't, so that just left him. But, you see, he couldn't either, not without help, so ...." Her voice trailed off at the end.

Uhura sat up straight on the bed. "So?" she demanded evenly.

"He asked for my help." It was barely whispered.

"Your help?" She smiled a little at the words that almost echoed the conversation with Jim that had begun the magical two and a half days.

"Yes."

"And you agreed?"

"Yes."

Uhura sighed. It was like pulling teeth to get anything out of Chris. Obviously, she needed to talk, but just as obviously she was having difficulty verbalizing her feelings.

"And now you regret it?"

"Oh, no!" There was no hesitation at all this time. "It's not that, Ny, not at all. It's just ...." Again she was hesitating. "What happens now?"

"Now? What do you want to happen now?"

Chapel blushed again, then smiled gently. "Like you, I'd say yes in a minute if he asked me again, but ... he won't. He wouldn't have in the first place if it weren't for his sense of responsibility and his worry about the captain."

That statement drew a disbelieving look, but Uhura wisely kept silent.

"It's all right, Ny, it really is. I wanted what happened on any terms, and I knew when it started ...." She flashed a brief smile, accompanied by a tiny shrug. "I can live with it. At least I have some pretty fantastic memories."

"That good, huh?"

"That good." Another smile. "It's just ...." Another hesitation, but a lesser

one this time. "It's just that I'm afraid of how he's going to react toward me now. I can live with what I did, but ... I'm not sure it's going to be that easy for him. I don't want him to be ... ashamed, or uncomfortable around me, or fearful that I might ... make demands on him. I'd hate to think I had lost his friendship, or respect."

"Why would you have?" Uhura was bluntly practical. "He asked, after all."

"I know, but you know how he is."

"No." Another grin. "How is he?"

Chapel took a playful slap at her friend. "Stop that. I'm serious."

Uhura sobered. "I know you are, Chris, but I wouldn't worry if I were you. Just stay away for a couple of days, give him some breathing room, then treat him normally when you do see him. When he sees you have no intentions of 'making demands' on him, he'll relax, and you'll see that everything really is all right."

"You really think so?"

"Of course. Then again, we could both be wrong." That wicked grin again. "He could be at the door to your quarters right now, panting in anticipation --" Uhura stopped grinning when she saw the look on Chapel's face. "Okay. I'll stop teasing -- if you'll stop worrying. Things will work out; you'll see."

★

Uhura hummed a soft tune as her fingers played over the controls on her communications console. Everything was quiet now, and had been for several days. Apparently, the Romulans had decided not to cross the zone after all -- if they had ever intended doing so. Maybe it had all been an elaborate hoax, designed to harass Jim Kirk and his crew. If so, they had picked a dandy time. She couldn't complain, though. She got a tingling feeling deep inside every time the captain looked at her. However, she was beginning to wonder. He had been all business the last few days, no sign at all that he was even contemplating continuing any special relationship -- except for a gentle look in his eyes whenever they met hers. She smiled a little at the thought of that look.

Humming a little more, she glanced up, then broke off as she caught the knowing look from Spock, whose Vulcan hearing obviously had picked up her romantic melody. He raised an eyebrow at her as though questioning the reason for her obvious happiness. She flushed with embarrassment before she had time to remind herself that he had no right to be shocked. Then she jumped as she heard a silken voice call for her attention.

"Lieutenant," the captain was asking, with absolutely no expression on his usually mobile face but with a gentle twinkle hidden deep in his hazel eyes, "I'm going to need a channel opened tonight, about twenty-one hundred hours. Can you take care of it for me?"

Her eyes widened at the brazenness of his query. Surely he didn't mean ....

"Would you like that ... er ... in your quarters, sir?" She had to be sure of his meaning.

"I believe that would be the most ... appropriate location, Lieutenant." He didn't so much as crack a smile, but that twinkle was still in his eyes. "I can count on your attention to this matter?"

"Of course, sir." She smiled at him, a radiant expression on her face.

"I'll be waiting," he smiled back, then repeated, "twenty-one hundred hours."

"Yes, sir." She turned at her station, catching Spock's gaze, his eyebrow still elevated. Grinning happily in anticipation of the evening ahead, she couldn't resist the temptation. Slowly, savoring the delightful sight of that eyebrow climbing ever higher to disappear completely beneath the dark bangs, she lowered one eyelid in a deliberate, shameless wink.

★

A week had passed when Spock saw Chapel again. He and Jim were going to supper, and Jim insisted on stopping by the lab to check on the doctor's progress.

She was there with McCoy, leaning on the counter next to the screen where he was working, reading over his shoulder. She straightened when they entered, smiled impersonally in their direction, and returned her concentration to their research.

Spock wondered if anyone else noticed the tightness across her shoulders. He could hear her saying, "What will you think of your logical solution next week?"

Kirk strode into the room, oblivious to his tension, not even noticing that Spock hung back for a moment as he searched inside himself for the answer to her question. Again he heard her odd, husky voice in his head, this time saying fiercely, ' -- Remember you asked for this!', and his promise echoed from his memory.

"Bones, how's it going?"

McCoy looked up from the screen, his face tired and frustrated. "I just can't figure the damn thing, Jim. This morning I thought I had something, but Chris and I have been through this tape twice, and ...."

"And?" Kirk propped up next to Chapel at the counter, looking at the list she was marking as they went through it.

"Nothing." McCoy rubbed his eyes. "My eyes are crossing."

"I think it's time for a break," Jim announced, grinning. "Let this go until tomorrow. Spock and I were gonna have supper and scare up some fun."

Spock and McCoy raised their eyebrows simultaneously, both looking at their captain as if he had lost his mind. Since the transference had reversed, he had been inordinately pleased with himself, and at times totally irreverent.

Chapel couldn't help but smile. "Go ahead. I'll finish this."

McCoy grimaced. "I'm not leaving you here to do this by yourself. Besides, that invitation wasn't really supposed to tempt me, was it?"

Kirk laughed while Spock looked indignant.

"I will stay and help Miss Chapel finish," Spock offered. "I do not think I care to 'scare up' any fun."

"Okay," McCoy said promptly before anybody could protest, elbowing Chapel where the others couldn't see.

She glared at him before turning back to Kirk and Spock, smiling sweetly. "That's okay. I really don't mind finishing up." Her heart was pounding so hard she thought they must surely be able to hear it. She didn't want to be alone with Spock. What would she say?

McCoy jumped up and bowed Spock into the seat he vacated.

Chapel had been standing at McCoy's elbow. Now she tried to back up, to put some space between Spock and herself, but McCoy had moved in close behind her, and gave her a playful push forward, urging her closer.

The ear-to-ear grin he sported faltered as she carefully stepped on his foot with her full weight and reached for his ribs with her elbow. "Ow-w-w!" he protested, his push real this time.

"Doctor." Spock looked at him as if he were a naughty child. "Would you please refrain from stepping on Miss Chapel? You are pushing her into the work." He neatly straightened the tapes Chapel had bumped.

"She was stepping on me!"

Spock gave Chapel a look of forbearance and she thought for a minute he was going to roll his eyes. She smiled at his rebuff of McCoy, struggling to keep from bursting into happy laughter because he was so obviously at ease sitting there beside her. "Thank you, Mr. Spock."

He returned his attention to the screen, rolling it back to the information McCoy had just checked. "Anytime."

McCoy watched the exchange, rubbing his ribs where Chapel's elbow had connected. Curiously, he noted the attractive flush that colored Christine's cheeks and that Spock was struggling not to smile.

Kirk had missed all of the conversation. He'd noticed a tendency to do that the last few days. The euphoria he was floating on lately was making him absent-minded. He was going to have to watch that. "Come on, Bones, I'll buy you a drink."

"Um-m-m." McCoy allowed himself to be led away, distracted by a feeling he rarely experienced -- that of having missed something.

S'MORE LEAVE

by DaraLyn Archer

There may be pleasanter ways in the world to come awake than being nuzzled and noodged and nibbled on by an amorously-inclined and well-endowed male, but you'll excuse me if I can't think of any.

I was lying on my side, cuddled spoon-fashion against his warm presence. There was a nicely scratchy mat of chest hair saying hello to the skin of my back, and a firm pressure against my fanny said the gentleman was either ready for action or had smuggled a salami into bed. I was rather hoping for the former.

He was nibbling my ear and breathing softly along my neck while his arm trapped mine and his hand tickled my breast. It dipped lower, stroking my belly, while its partner sneaked under my side and began teasing the other breast. An underhanded move, so to speak.

I didn't mind. In fact, I snuggled closer and stretched, just to encourage him. It worked just fine, as the trailing hand rubbed itself down my belly and some very clever fingers dipped into the honey-pot.

Mmmm. Very nice.

The lips worked their way up my neck while all this was going on, and a magnolia-tinged voice said, "You wanna play doctor?"

I turned over against him and opened one eye. He was grinning like he'd just been granted the patent on sex; a nicely crooked grin that crinkled the skin at the corners of twinkling blue eyes. There was only one problem.

I'd never seen the man before in my entire life.

I said something brilliant, like, "Glmmphph?!" and sat up, clutching the sheet. It drooped down nicely on either side of my fist, and my breasts waved merrily at him.

"What?"

He waggled interestingly mismatched dark eyebrows at me. "I said, do you wanna --"

"No!" I yelped, and slid out of the playpen.

He grinned again and slid over, tossing the blanket aside. "Oh. You wanna play catch-me, catch-me!"

I think I said, "Yikes!", or something equally coherent, and bolted.

I've never seen a man move so fast. I hadn't even made one circuit before he tackled me. The fact that I'd forgotten to let go of the sheet didn't help. We went down in a tangle, and he ended up on top, pinning my wrists spread-eagle while he started kissing and nipping everything he could reach ... which was a lot. He scooted the sheet out of the way with his chin -- clever fellow -- and started tickling me under the breast with his tongue.

"Cut it *out!*"

"Oh, no. I caught you fair and square, missy."

Well, I was wriggling and squirming, and *he* was wriggling and squirming, and pretty soon it became very clear it wasn't a salami at all.

I gasped a little bit when he slid into me, and he let go my wrists to catch my face and hold it for a very thorough kiss. I probably could have done something defensive, now that my hands were free, but ... well, the juices were flowing pretty

good by that time, and he was one hell of a good kisser, and he really didn't seem to want to hurt me. Nope. Last thing on his mind, really.

He was making long, slow, delicious strokes that reached clear the hell up to my tonsils, or somewhere, and withdrawing at an angle that had my clit doing everything but triple somersaults. I could feel the beginning twitches that forecast a truly remarkable come, and his busy little hands were doing things to my breasts that had them singing six-part harmony.

Well, hell, what would *you* have done? Right. Get your feet under you, lady, and start reciprocating.

So we reciprocated for five or ten minutes ... hell, it might have been five or ten weeks. I wasn't really looking at my watch. He'd stopped kissing me by this time, and his tongue was playing tag with my nipples. I was so ready that my teeth were melting, but he seemed content to keep on reciprocating, so I slid my hand over his ass, ran one finger up the back door, and pinched the base of his balls. He let out a whoop and lifted me clear off the floor, and we came like two freight rockets colliding at 40,000 kilometers. It was a long, long way down in freefall, and I enjoyed every foot of it.

When we finally stopped quivering and twitching, he slid off, said something that sounded like, "Oh, Tanya," and pulled the sheet up over us, clamping one arm around my waist and hooking one foot over my ankle.

Well, I wasn't exactly planning on going anywhere, anyway, except maybe back to sleep. That seemed like a good idea, so I did.

★

After a while, my bladder started making demanding noises, and woke me up. I worked my way out of all the encumbrances, watching his face as I did so. It was a nice face. Happy, even asleep. (Why shouldn't he be happy? You don't get screwed that good every day.) I wished I knew who the hell he was.

I realized I didn't know where the bathroom was, either. There were three doors in the room, one set of them the folding jobs that generally mean a closet. They did. One door opened into a living room area, and from the empty glasses scattered around, somebody'd had quite a party. Maybe it was us. I couldn't remember. In fact, I couldn't remember anything before waking up in the bed with him.

The other door opened into the bathroom. There was a naked lady across the room. I slammed the door, then opened it a crack and peeked around the edge. She was doing the same thing.

Oh. A mirror. Boy, you don't catch me twice with that old trick. We walked toward each other. Yup. A naked lady. Is that me? Dark hair, shoulder length. Couple of eyes. Brown, I think. A sort of sharp-angled, kinda foxy face. Nice boobs. Pert little ass. Legs go all the way up. Both of 'em. That's good.

"Hi," I said. We waved at each other.

I used the commode and peed about six quarts. *Must* have been me at that party. My friend in the mirror was sitting on the wrong pot. Huh? Oh, a bidet. Well then, this must be my place. So howcum I couldn't find the head?

Used the bidet, too. Marvelous invention. Turn the pressure up a little, you could do a solo on it.

Frosted glass doors over there. Must be a shower. Ahh ... heaven. Lots of hot water, needle spray, sudsy soap. Washed everything. Twice. Was just thinking about getting out when the door slid open and a long hairy arm came in and tested the water. The rest of him followed. My goodness. Everything's long and hairy. Well, not *everything*. Hairy, that is. Long, though. And nicely plump. And starting to stand up and take notice.

"Mind if I join you?"

"You already did."

I backed up a little, and he lathered up, singing. I think it was singing. Sort of. He shook the water out of his hair and grinned at me again.

"You missed a spot," he said, and started soaping me up again. Slowly. All over. *He* didn't miss any spots. No, sir. Very thorough fellow.

My toes were starting to shrivel.

"I think I'll get out now."

"But you're all wet."

"Yeah. Happens every time I take a shower."

"Maybe there aren't any towels. I can't let you get out that way. You might catch cold." Thoughtful guy. He started licking the droplets of water off.

"Aaahhh --" I said.

"Mmmmmm," he said, and started rubbing water off my belly and ass with his hands. It was a losing battle, because he hadn't turned the spray off, but that didn't stop him. Didn't even slow him down. He just kept rubbing and licking and sliding lower and lower until he was kneeling in front of me and doing what comes naturally. If you're slightly depraved, that is.

He was stroking and licking and ooching my legs apart with his hands, and I grabbed his hair to sort of convince him the whole thing was not a good idea. But when I moved my hands, that needle spray hit me across the breasts and I ended up involving him even deeper. Reflex action, you know. Must have been. So was flexing my knees and tilting my pelvis up and throwing my head back so those delicious jets of water could do their thing.

He had one hand against the small of my back so I wouldn't fall down and break anything important, and most of the other hand checking out important to see if it was all there -- it was -- while that busy little tongue kept licking and swirling and probing. Then the lips and teeth got into the act, and he was sucking and nibbling, and sliding in and out of me with his fingers, which made up in dexterity what they lacked in length.

I went, *"Ngaaaaaghghgh ..."* and the top of my head came off. Must have. Honey, if you've never come in the shower while being simultaneously finger-fucked and sucked off, you've never come. I came so hard and so long it gave me the hiccups. I was still twitching when he shifted position and pulled me down on his lap.

I folded my legs back so I could lift from my knees, and slid down onto what felt like nine feet of long, hard, slick cock. It went on and on forever, and I hoped it was fastened on tight, because I was coming again, twisting around him so strong I thought sure I'd turn him inside out.

He got his mouth around one breast and his hand around the other, and gave back as good as he got. We pumped like counter-matched pistons, and every time I came down, I could feel his balls pushed up against my snatch by the hard floor of the shower.

He made the same silly noise I'd made, and grabbed me tight around the waist to keep me from lifting off again as he pumped twenty or thirty gallons of jiz into me, spraying hard and hot as the shower had. I could actually feel his balls squirming, and that set me off again, coming in long hard convulsions and pushing his head against my breast until I thought it would pop out under my right shoulder blade.

I finally let go of his head and flopped my forehead down on his shoulder, panting hard and still twitching, trying to wring out the last lovely drops when all hell broke loose.

The shower door slid back, and the lady in the mirror -- the other me -- stuck her head in and let out a scream they must have heard on Ganymede.

"Leonard!"

He kind of flopped his head back and rolled his eyes around, trying to get them to focus, and said, "Oh, hi, Tanya," and grinned a sick little grin. Then --

"Tonia?!?! Whaa --??"

Oh, I thought. Not Tanya. Tonia. Or maybe I was Tanya and she was Tonia. Because the me that was me was being pushed rudely off a now-depleted lap, and the me that wasn't me was standing there with her mouth hanging open and a washcloth in her hand and sounds that weren't words coming up in her throat and getting all tangled up

with her teeth.

"Len -- how could -- who is -- what .... *WHO IS THAT WOMAN????"*

And he was looking from one of me to the other of me, and *he* was making those same kind of sounds now, going, "But -- you -- she -- how -- *what are you doing here?"* and trying to cover himself up with both hands, which I thought was eminently silly.

Somebody had to do something intelligent, so I did. I turned the water off. The last of it went down the drain with a little *glugg-glugg-glugg* sound. Or maybe it was him -- Leonard -- making the sounds. I was just kneeling there looking up at myself and trying to figure out what the hell was going on.

"Out!" the me-that-wasn't yelled. "Get out of here, you ... you ... you --"

"No," the me-that-was said. "I was here first."

"The hell you were! Leonard, who *is* this woman?"

"I thought she was you," he said weakly.

"I was. I mean I am. I mean you're -- oh, the hell with it," I said, and got out. He'd lied -- there *were* towels. I wrapped one around my head and one around my bod, which I felt put me one up on the other me, who was still standing there buffety-ass naked with that ridiculous little washcloth.

"Look," I said, "there must be a logical explanation."

"You bet there is," the other me snorted. She'd obviously never been so mad in all my life. "The minute my back is turned, you conjure up a replacement, you two-timing --"

"What??" he said. Brilliant as hell, this guy. Damn good thing he's a first-class lay.

"I got called back to the ship," she snapped. "Right after we ...." She shot me a look that would have melted glass. "Anyway, I didn't want to wake you, because I hoped I'd be able to get right back, but I got hung up, and I just now got loose."

"I do hope you were hung up as nicely as I was," I smirked. Nice touch, I thought.

She smacked at me with the washcloth, and I grabbed it to pull it out of her hands, but she didn't let go. The floor was pretty wet by this time, and she fell flat on her ass and yanked me down over her. She smacked me a good one in the left ear, and I kicked her in the boobs, and she snatched the towel off my head and got both hands full of hair. I elbowed her in the gut, and she fell back and dragged me over in a somersault, and then Mr. Brilliant figured out he'd better break it up before we killed each other.

He pried us apart and got in between us, which was either brave or stupid, or maybe just kinky, because she was shoving up against him from the front and I was shoving up against him from the back, and if there'd been any life left in the old boy, he could have got one hell of a daisy-chain going.

She reached around him to claw at me, and he sort of pushed her back a little bit, and her feet went out from under her again and she smacked that wet tile floor with a sound like somebody breaking kindling.

"Back off, Yeoman," he yelled at her. "That's an order!"

"Fuck your goddamn orders! You're out of uniform!"

"So are you, sweetie," I put in.

"You hush up, too!" he yelled, swinging around and suddenly listing to starboard as he slipped in a puddle. I made a grab for him, caught his elbow, and quite efficiently tumbled both of us ass-over-teakettle onto that damned tile floor. Hadn't anybody around here ever heard of carpeting?

There was ass and boobs and cock and jiz and soap and water all *over* the place, and every time I tried to get up, somebody would push or pull or get in the way, and finally I happened to glance toward the door, and there was a pair of feet.

Oh, shit-o-dear.

I looked up. A tall, silver-haired dude in a fancy long nightgown was standing there staring at us and wringing his hands and saying, "Oh, gracious, oh my goodness,

oh I never dreamed .... I came as soon as I learned ...."

Leonard gaped up at him and finally managed to gain his feet, picking up a discarded towel on the way.

"Well now, Mr. Caretaker, maybe *you* can help sort this mess out. Do *you* know what's goin' on?"

"In a manner of speaking. At least, I can make an educated guess. Much of this ... occurrence ... took place while I was off duty. The machines are very efficient, you understand, but they *do* sometimes --"

"Please," Leonard hinted. "The educated guess?"

"Oh, yes, of course. Now ... yesterday, after the function of this planet was explained to you, you and the ... young lady ...." He looked from one of me to the other in confusion. I could understand that -- there was a lot of it going around.

"Er ... the two of you requested a private domicile, equipped in a manner conducive to ... um ... establishing a rather intimate relationship. Then, I understand, Miss Barrows ...." Again he looked at both of me, frowning a little. "... was called back to the ship. Tell me," he said, trying to look each of me straight in the eye at the same time, "what were your ... ah ... thoughts at being called away?"

I didn't know what he was talking about, so I looked at the other me, and damned if she wasn't *blushing!* I mean, she came prancing in here naked, all ready to jump into the shower with *my* man, and *she* had the nerve to *blush!*

"Well ..." she stammered. "I was ... angry. And ... disappointed ...."

"And wishing, perhaps, that you didn't have to leave?"

"...Yes."

"Anticipating the ... um ... activities you would ... er ... indulge in when you returned?"

"Well ...."

"I thought as much. And you, Doctor McCoy, were unaware of her departure. You had dropped off to sleep assuming that Miss Barrows would be here when you awoke."

"Yeah." He was nodding his head and looking like the light was beginning to dawn. It was still midnight for me.

"So you see," old Silver-hair said, "she was."

"Huh?" I said. Okay; it wasn't brilliant, but it was all I could think of. I looked over at my other half, and she was looking at me. *Really* looking, for the first time. Her mouth dropped open again, and she sputtered, "You mean, she's --? That I --?"

"Precisely. You, and Doctor McCoy, through your paired wishes and expectations, created this simulacrum --"

"Who are you callin' a crumb, you creep? And who invited you in here, anyway? Why don't you just leave -- and take *her* with you?"

"My dear, you don't understand. *She* --" He pointed at the party-crasher. "-- is the real Tonia Barrows. You are an imitation."

"Imitation?" I swung around and pointed my chest at him. "What're these -- chopped liver?"

He reached out as if to touch me, and I skittered around behind Leonard.

"Truly a work of art. It will be a shame to reprocess you. The doctor and the yeoman must have unusually strong --"

"Reprocess? What kind of sick joke is this?"

Leonard put his arm around me protectively. "Are you sure you couldn't make an exception? Just this once?"

The "real" Tonia glared at us, and I stuck my tongue out at her.

"The process is quite painless, Doctor. And, I assure you, should the need ever arise, we can create another one for you."

"It just seems kinda ... heartless."

He shook his silvery head. "Not really. This ... duplicate ... has no soul. No substance. No existence, really, except in your mind. She -- it -- will cease to

exist the moment you stop thinking of it. The processing machinery is merely a ... convenience. We could eliminate it entirely if all our guests were capable of precise thought projection."

There was a loud beeping sound from the bedroom. Leonard scowled, muttered something unintelligible, and left. When he returned, he had on black pants and a long face.

"Sorry, sugar. We're gonna have to go. Time to get back to business."

I wasn't sure who he was apologizing to, but the other me seemed to think it was her. She trudged out of the room, and the old dude caught my wrist when I started to follow her.

"No, Tonia."

"*She's* Tonia. *I'm* Tanya, and I'm *real!*"

"No, my dear. You are not. You exist only as long as they continue to think of you."

I peeked around him, past the open door. He was zipping her into a short red dress and patting her shoulder and telling her there'd be other times. She told him there'd *better* be, and then turned around and plastered herself against him like moss on a tree trunk and laid a kiss on him that curled up the tips of his boots. Then they stood a few feet apart as a high-pitched whine filled the room. They coalesced into shimmering pillars of light, and then the room was empty.

I sighed and slumped, waiting to melt or something.

Nothing happened.

I grinned at Silver-hair. "Surprise! I'm still here! They're gone, and they're not thinking about me any more -- *boy*, are they not thinking about *me* any more -- and I'm still here! That *proves* I'm real!"

"This is most irregular," he said. "Perhaps because there were two people involved in your creation ...."

"Listen. You said I stopped existing when they stopped thinking of me. Well, part of the time, he was asleep, and I was still here. I got up and went to the *bathroom*, for chrissakes. Do your whatchamacrums have bladders that wake them up out of a sound sleep?"

"YOU ARE NOT REAL!" he yelled.

"Prove it, buster!"

"You are a fantasy. Our guests come here, think their desires, and we provide them in physical form. You were one of the fantasies."

"I'm *not*. I'm *real*, and I'll have you know I've got a few fantasies of my own."

"You cannot call another simulacrum into existence, because *you* are one yourself!"

"Oh, yeah? Watch this." I closed my eyes and concentrated. Hard. *Hard* ... that's a lovely word. Hard. Soft. Warm. Slippery.

The shower came on, and Silver-hair's eyes got wider.

Somebody in the shower started singing. Sort of.

Silver-hair's eyebrows did a disappearing act under his bangs.

A long, muscular arm reached out of the half-open shower door and groped around.

"Tanya? You in here?"

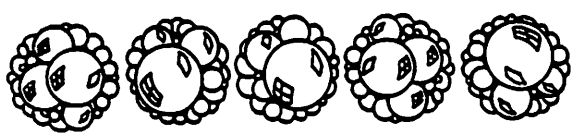
Silver-hair blanched and gulped. "This is *most* irregular," he said again. "I must check on the machinery."

"You do that, fella," I called as he scurried away.

"Sugar," the magnolia-tinged voice called again, "you wanna soap my back?"

I turned around and looked at that beckoning arm with the bristly black hairs on it.

"I'd rather soap your front," I said, and stepped into the jetting stream of hot, steamy water.



Romulan Execution

by L.P. Santos

She sat in the dim light as the guards unceremoniously dropped their captive before her. Dressed in the traditional dark blue jumpsuit of a colony farmer, he casually stood and adjusted the manacles. Hands bound behind his back, he remained safely secured.

Thankfully, he showed no physical signs of the struggle which must have taken place. She took satisfaction in this. Her orders to the guards had clearly stated what would happen to them should any harm come to this man.

She felt a silent amusement over the situation. Once she had been the captive. Now she had him in her control. Ever since she heard the description from the colonist of their prisoner she had anticipated this moment. The dim-witted colonists had not discovered his true identity. To them he was simply a Vulcan spy who had attempted to infiltrate Romulan space. To her he was the solution to all of her nightmares.

From the connecting room she heard the slight noise as the door opened. With graceful ease her second-in-command -- and lover -- entered. Silhouetted by the corridor light, his darkly clad form took on a foreboding air. He gazed at their new acquisition with a look of pure hatred. Like her, he had longed to see this man again, but for slightly different reasons.

Like her own darkened dreams, he too was plagued by the past: a past which brought forth his warrior instinct of vengeance. Day by day she felt his growing uneasiness and knew that soon he must deal with his memories, just as she too must deal with hers.

When enough time had passed she rose from her desk and moved into the light. Turning, their silent captive simply raised a brow in greeting. So he did remember, she thought as she crossed her arms and leaned against her desk. With a slight smile she felt that this would be a day to remember.

"Leave us, Tal," she ordered as his eyes suddenly turned to her.

Looking to her, he seemed to search for an answer. He knew, or suspected, what she was about to do. Yet he chose to keep his silence. It was as if he was aware of her turmoil and her need to confront it directly, yet he could not help but be concerned.

"Commander," he said hesitantly as he moved toward her.

"I said leave us. Now."

With reluctance he nodded, then gave a sharp signal to the guards. As each one filed out she felt Tal's concern. Despite the fact that the Vulcan was securely chained, he still feared for her safety. Whether he feared what <u>she</u> would do or what the Vulcan could do, she did not know.

"Commander. The guards shall be stationed outside should you have need of them," he stated as he glanced at the Vulcan.

She watched the Vulcan raise a brow as a look of total innocence crossed his eyes. Smiling, she looked away from Tal as he left the quarters. No, she had nothing to fear from this Vulcan, for he would never harm her.

"So," she said as she turned on the remaining lights and moved behind her desk,

"we meet again."

After only a moment of hesitation he nodded as he moved slightly forward.

"It was inevitable," was all he stated as he attempted to adjust the manacles behind his back. She watched in fascination as this simple movement caused his muscles to ripple under the snugly fitting jumpsuit.

"Inevitable, no doubt, for a spy," she answered as she turned her eyes away. Glancing at the neatly kept desk, her eyes fell upon a single holograph. It had been taken during a time when happiness reigned her entire life. That was a time when she had no concerns to distract her, a time when she allowed her womanhood to flourish. It was a part of her life that she had never revealed -- one she hoped to keep secret from others.

At the irrationality of her thoughts she raised her head again. She was a Romulan warrior and a high ranking officer. Such idealistic thoughts had no place in her life.

At his silent gaze she knew that he had witnessed her momentary flaw. For some unknown reason she felt as if he were searching for any hidden weakness. Despite this feeling, she knew that his searching was not meant as a threat. Instead, it seemed as if he were truly concerned for her welfare.

Ignoring this, she sighed as she looked away. She felt fatigued beyond belief. She was tired of the whole game of intrigue. Yet she knew her duty to both her people and her title. Above all else, she was a warrior.

Strength renewed, she turned to her Vulcan captive.

"No doubt you understand the price which Romulus has put on your head. And no doubt you understand that the execution I began years ago will finally be completed." She watched the features of his finely sculptured face as she spoke.

"I understood the price that I would pay if I failed," he answered.

"Yet still you came," she said as she once again moved to stand in front of him.

"Why? Why would you risk your life so? Is your loyalty rooted so deeply in the Federation that gives you neither the power nor the respect which you deserve? No ..." she quickly corrected herself, "the power which you have earned."

At his silence she moved closer and reached out to touch him. Suppressing the urge, she hastily pulled away and turned her back to him. How she had longed to touch him. To feel his strength through his embrace would have been more than enough to make her set him free.

Instead she resisted this urge and moved to the far wall. Like a frightened child who cowered in a corner she retreated to her familiar belongings. Hanging from the wall was a simple, almost obscure plaque. Mounted on hand-carved bark from the Aienal tree of Remus, its bronze inlay held two intricate engravings. One was the ancient symbol of her family name. Below that perched the blazon image of a sharp-toothed, winged reptile -- her family crest. If all of her past victories suddenly vanished, she would still have this.

Below the plaque hung the glimmering sword of her family. Shaped on the edge of Vulcan's forge nearly four thousand years ago, it remained as a permanent reminder of where her true blood line ended. Its almost-darkened highlights had been smithed by Sorran, the greatest of Vulcan's swordsmiths. Like the sword, its protective wood scabbard was hand carved by one of Vulcan's most gifted sculptors. Although she knew the price that many would pay for it, she held it dearly for its value to her blood line.

Her great-great-grandfather, Sukte, had been the first to receive the gifts of the sword and scabbard. Taking them into his care, he used them as was expected of Vulcan warriors. Then when the harshness of Vulcan's barbaric times threatened to consume the entire planet, he and a small band of followers fled what they thought was a dying world.

On a far distant planet they had found peace. They had begun a new life with the same warrior code of honor. Although they kept the principles of Vulcan, they had integrated the beliefs of the future. They brought into their culture the

beauty of art and the knowledge of science. And they introduced one major aspect to their lives. Instead of many clans to rule over the people, as on Vulcan, they had only one -- one major clan, one major policing force under the rulership of one leader -- the Praetor.

His guidance took them away from the barbaric ways of Vulcan, and directed them toward one purpose: to succeed and survive as a race. They had survived through the many hardships of the land and they had lived through the savage attacks from the Klingons. More importantly, they lived to carry on their warrior code of honor.

Glancing at the black, leather-bound hilt she realized the great significance of its existance. Like their culture, it had been passed down through the generations as a silent reminder of their past and of their honor.

As this thought crossed her mind she felt the confusion rage within her. Once she had been certain of her duty. She knew who she was and what path she was to take. Now she was torn in two. She was divided between being a Romulan commander and being a woman. Although her mind told her to follow the warrior code, her heart beckoned to journey down a different road. Visualizing the fork in that road, she knew that soon she would have to choose which path she was to travel.

With a slight, ironic smile she lightly touched the scabbard's hilt. It had not been meant for her. Had her youngest brother not died, she would never have seen it. But his death left her family without a son to carry the heritage on. So the sword passed to her, the last living member of her family.

Angered by the awesome responsibility, she turned to face the Vulcan. Adjusting his bands, he remained silent as he watched her movements.

"Do you not know that you could have been given all that you deserved, here within the Romulan Empire?"

He did not answer. He simply watched her with his intense brown eyes. Seeing the slight quiver of his adam's apple she smiled as she lightly touched his cheek.

"You could have the command you deserved, and the wealth," she whispered, "and you could have had me."

He remained silent as his dark, discerning eyes penetrated her soul.

"It is not a command or wealth which I desire, but I truly regret losing the latter."

"You once stated that military secrets were the most fleeting of all. Do you remember what else you said?"

At the memory of the words he sighed and closed his eyes.

"I stated that I hoped what we had shared together would be more permanent," he said as he looked down at her.

"Was it? Are those few moments of passion still etched in your memory, or have you now forgotten that time?" she asked as she unconsciously ran her fingers through his short black hair.

"Need you ask?" was all he replied as he moved toward her. From somewhere in the distance she heard the rattle of chains as his soft, moist lips met hers. At first his kisses were gentle. Then with a bit more urgency his tongue pressed against her closed lips.

With both arms clinging to him she parted her lips and allowed his gentle exploring. Like two lost lovers their mouths clung together as their tongues united. Pressing her body close to his, she was instantly aware of his finely shaped body.

Pulling away, she glanced up at him as she fought for air. It was still the same. No other man could stir her with just the touch of his lips. And no other man could satisfy her needs like him. As she looked into his dark, secretive eyes she was suddenly reminded of that day long ago.

The remembrance of their hours together brought forth a smile. Brief though it was, they had managed to spend the time wisely. Exploring each other like virgin lovers, their bodies had sought and given pleasure freely. They had not noticed or cared that their allegiances were opposed. All that concerned them was sating their burning lust.

Returning to the present, she leaned against him. He was still the man she

remembered him to be -- tall, strong and proud, and he was right in saying what he had said years ago aboard the Enterprise. She would not have respected him had he chosen to turn his back on his Federation and join her. No amount of power or wealth could buy him; that is what made him the man that he was.

"Since you are to be executed, you may be given one last request. What shall it be?" she asked as she turned away from him.

After an eternity of silence he answered, "If you must ask and do not know, then perhaps what I wish for cannot be granted."

Turning to face him, she tried to read his face for any sign of deception but saw only sincerity. He knew that soon he would die and all he longed for was her. Smiling, she retrieved the coded key from her desk.

So, his last dying wish is one I too would have asked from him, she thought as she moved to unfasten the manacles.

★

Nestled in his arms, she listened to his quiet breathing. After their long hours of love he now lay in a deep sleep. Nuzzling close against his chest, her fingers unconsciously began to twirl his chest hairs.

Again he had proved himself to her. He was the only one able to satisfy her many times over. From the touch of his hands on her body to his satiny smooth tongue he had done to her what no other could.

Even if he had not been so skillful with both tongue and hands, she was almost certain that he could make her come simply by thrusting his length into her. And this, she noted, he did with great skill. It seemed that no matter what he did, he managed to arouse her.

She too was a skillful lover. His constant arousal proved that she was no stranger to love.

She noticed that she treated him differently. With every past lover, as with her most recent, Tal, she had chosen to be the aggressor. Only by controlling the movements from a superior position was she able to feel pleasure. But with Spock it was different. She delighted in feeling his full weight bearing down on her. Just to wrap her legs around his slender hips and feel him repeatedly thrust into her caused her to climax time and again.

His very aggression provided her with pleasure. By controlling and manipulating her body into positions she had never dared try, he had managed to satisfy them both. Although Tal was more than willing to experiment with her, he did not have the imagination or aggression she needed in love.

From the outer office she heard the slight noise of Tal entering her quarters. Looking over at the chronometer she noticed with shock that morning had arrived. She moved slowly from the cramped confinement of the small bed to the wall dresser and rummaged for a gown. Dressing in the first thing she found, she turned to the small bed.

Still in a deep sleep, Spock had moved into a fetal position. She marveled at the perfection of his body, the muscular build that was surely the object of lust of all Federation women he encountered.

Pulling the blanket past his shoulders, she uncharacteristically tucked the covers around him, patted his sleek black hair and planted a soft kiss on his forehead. At her touch he mumbled an inaudible word, shivered, then fell back into a deep sleep. Lightly she touched his cheek then moved to join Tal.

Entering her quarters, she moved past her desk to where Tal stood. He remained silent as he noticed her state of dress. She could sense the controlled anger within him. She knew that had the situation been different he would have challenged and killed Spock. But he knew of her feelings toward this man. She would have felt his loss as surely as if it were Tal, so out of his respect for her he kept his rage bridled.

Not only did he respect her wishes, but he was also aware of his title and the responsibility he held. He knew that jealousy was unsightly in a Romulan officer.

He also understood that despite her actions with the Vulcan, she would always choose Tal as her lifemate. By accepting her and protecting her, he showed that he was indeed a man worthy to keep a woman of her status.

The satisfaction they found together was not physical, but one of knowing that he accepted her, loved her, for who she was. Unlike others, he expected nothing in return. She was grateful that such a man had chosen to share his life with her.

Moving close to him, she gently ran a palm over his smooth cheek. Taking her hand in his, he laid a single kiss in her palm. Watching him, her heart suddenly ached. He deserved better, a command of his own and a woman who adored only him, but he had chosen to remain with her.

As the torrid feelings of her emotions surfaced she realized what it was she had to do. Only a short while ago her life was in a state of confusion. Now, in this short flicker of time, all became clear to her. What they had planned a year ago must now be implemented. Feeling the resolve within her mind she sighed and gently squeezed his hand.

"The time is now, Tal," her voice cut through the stillness.

He looked up at her as he continued to hold her hand.

"Now, Commander? So soon?" he asked, bewildered.

"Now, Tal. The time will never again be so right. We must move swiftly if we are to succeed.

"But so soon -- perhaps it would be safer to wait."

Noting his hesitancy, she smiled as she clasped his hand firmly.

"It is not necessary for you to be involved. You may leave this cleanly," she said as he studied her features.

"Commander, you know I could not do that. I shall be by your side always. I was merely concerned about the timetable. This may change everything."

Seeing his open concern, she moved closer to him.

"I know, Tal. The timetable is being changed, but if we do not act now we may never be able to again," she said as she stroked his cheek.

He did not reply. Instead he seemed lost within his own thoughts. His expression showed clearly the silent demons he was now confronting. Then, pulling himself from his haunted thoughts, he smiled at her.

"Do not worry, my commander, I shall begin the preparations. By tonight all will be ready and we shall be victorious," he assured her before kissing her cheek, then turned and left.

Victory in their plans was of the utmost importance. There was no room for errors -- they could not fail.

Alone, she hugged herself, then walked into the darkened bedroom. She stripped off her gown, dropped it to the floor, then nudged Spock's sleeping form.

With a slight moan he squeezed his eyes slightly open, then pulled the blanket up in invitation. Stretching out beside him, she snuggled closer into his protective embrace. Despite the cramped conditions, she felt quietly comfortable and knew that sleep would soon overcome her.

Yawning, she settled herself on his arm as the darkness of sleep slowly consumed her.

★

Remembering their time together, she smiled. As with the previous times he had been wonderful. There seemed to be no end to his talent for pleasure or for his endless energy. But as with all things, it had to end.

With this thought, she left the warmth of the covers and retreated into the restroom. As she began to dress, her mind wondered over many paths. So much depended on their success. Without it there was nothing -- no reward for the hard labor which she and Tal had endured the past year, and nothing to justify their actions.

They must succeed. Neither the Praetor or the Federation would be allowed to interfere with their plans. Resolve strengthened, she checked her immaculate uniform

before leaving the facility.

She watched Spock's silent movements as she entered the outer room. Apparently sensing a change in her mood, he chose to dress of his own accord rather than have her give the order. As he felt her presence, he turned toward her as he zipped up the coverall.

"Is it time?" he asked as he stood facing her.

"Soon," she answered as she looked away. Somehow making him an unwitting pawn did not seem right, yet she and Tal were also pawns -- pawns of a higher force, but pawns nonetheless.

As if on cue the door opened to admit Tal. Still in the morning's uniform, his weary form stood in silence as he held the manacles. Looking from Tal to the chains, Spock tried unsuccessfully to hide his distaste.

"Those are unnecessary," Spock stated grimly. "I will offer no resistance."

"All condemned prisoners are bound so. There can be no exceptions," she stated confidently as she nodded to Tal.

Sensing the change in her, he looked away as Tal clasped the bands securely around his wrists. Once his hands were secured behind his back she turned and left, assured that they would follow.

Walking through the empty corridors, her mind began to race over their plans. Step by step she looked for errors, but could find none. She had done her part, and was confident that Tal had done his.

She turned down a hallway and stopped before a sealed door. Once the proper code was entered, the door opened to reveal the expanse of the shuttle bay. She walked to the most distant shuttle, knowing by the echoing footsteps that Tal and Spock still followed.

Turning, she watched as Tal removed the bonds from Spock's hands. Somewhat bewildered, he rubbed his wrists as a questioning brow rose. Nodding toward Tal, she remained silent until he disappeared into the shuttle.

"We are currently patrolling the outer edges of the Neutral Zone. This shuttle is fueled and provisioned for three months. Leave now, and never return to Romulan space again."

Spock's face was granite. "I do not understand," he said, "am I not be be executed?"

"Your captain once gave me my life," she said. "I am returning the favor." She turned away from him.

"Then you release me without an interrogation. You do not even wonder why I entered Romulan space." At her silence he moved closer to her side.

"Commander, need I point out that your actions are highly illogical? In fact, they could prove detrimental to your safety. You do not know why I was where you found me. Others have seen me here -- why put yourself in such danger for my sake?"

She whirled about to face him. "However amusing you were, I do not grant your freedom because of your prowess in bed. One such as yourself I could obtain anywhere." She took a deep breath, endeavoring to calm her sudden fury.

"There is important cargo aboard that shuttle. I want it delivered to the Federation, to safety."

"The cargo --"

"Is aboard. Leave it at that. When the time is right, you will understand."

"Will I also know if it is a trap?" He looked toward the shuttle. "Perhaps I shall refuse to take it into Federation space."

"You have no choice. We will not execute you. If we must, we will sedate and place you aboard the shuttle and the autopilot will take you there. Do you choose to leave in this fashion?" she asked as Tal exited the craft.

Moving to her side, he gave a curt nod as he glared at the captive.

"Everything is prepared. The choice of how you leave is up to you," she stated simply.

For a moment of silence both men glared at each other, as if measuring the strength and weakness of the other. Apparently sensing Tal's hidden fury, Spock

conceded with a nod. It was evident to the Vulcan that Tal desired to demonstrate his great physical skills on him.

"Very well, Commander," he said, "it seems you leave me no choice."

"No, Commander Spock, it seems I do not," she stated before she signalled Tal to escort him aboard the shuttle.

She watched as the two tall men moved in silence. In amusement she noticed how similar they both were. *They could be mistaken for brothers,* she thought absent-mindedly.

Spock stood in the hatch of the shuttle and turned his solemn eyes to her. Raising his hand, he parted his slender fingers to render the Vulcan salute.

"Live long and prosper," she heard him say before he turned to the interior.

As Tal began to lock the shuttle door she felt a single tear escape her control and slip down her cheek.

"After today, my Vulcan lover, that will not be possible," she whispered.

★

Leaning back in the pilot's seat, Spock gazed into the void of space. Despite the fact that his mission was completed he could not help but feel empty. Perhaps this reaction stemmed from the disastrous results of the assignment.

He had been sent undercover to monitor the activities of the Praetor. Federation sources had reported that the Praetor had issued a full scale search, but for who or what, they did not know. The irrationality of this action, a movement toward the edge of sanity, had worried the Federation. Spock had been sent to infiltrate the Praetor's household in order to obtain more information. In this task he had failed. He had been discovered on an outlying planet colonized by Romulan farmers. Being taken prisoner by farmers had been more embarrassing than painful. To then be turned over to the Romulan commander from his past had only intensified his shame.

Remembrance of that one night with her sent his thoughts once again to their first time together. Although it had only been a matter of hours, they had managed to share each other fully. This was a practice he did not openly indulge in, but with her, it seemed second nature. *Perhaps this was due to the combination of her Vulcan-like beauty and Romulan aggression in bed,* he thought as he turned to check the chronometer.

In less than two point one hours he would be rendezvousing with the Enterprise. Then he would have to report in detail his botched mission as well as the valuable cargo he had failed to locate. But he would omit his exploit with the commander. Such things were private, and he saw no military reason for intimate disclosures.

Turning idly in the control seat, he looked around the small craft. Too small to carry even a load of zenite, he wondered what she had meant by valuable cargo. Surely she did not mean the craft itself. Although it would be useful to inspect the craft, it could hardly be considered special. Starfleet had known of the style of craft the Romulans used for years now.

As his mind wandered over the many possibilities, a slight noise was heard from the rear of the craft. Snapping to attention, he moved cautiously toward the sound. As he approached the sleeping cubicle, he spied a small panel welded into the deck. Not having noticed it before, he now saw that it was easily removable. As he cautiously removed the panel, he noticed the hidden space which was dimly lit.

Within the compartment, surrounded by the tubes and machinery of a life support system, was a small Romulan child. By mass and weight, its age was between one and two standard years. The only items with the child were a small toy and a diaper. At his feet sat a burgundy satin bundle and a rolled-up velvet blanket.

As he lifted the blanket he was surprised at its weight. Laying it across his lap he began to unwrap the hidden contents. With a slight gasp he unfolded the last piece of cloth. He pulled the heavy black metal from its scabbard. As the weapon sang out its sharpness, he noticed how the simple lighting of the cabin was reflected in the silver-black iron. Admiringly he turned it in his hand and noticed the side inscription. Although it was in the most ancient of Vulcan languages he understood

them and knew the true origin of its magnificence.

Written along the side were the markings of Sorran, Vulcan's prime smith who lived before the Prereform era. It had been said that out of the hundreds of swords he created, only three had survived the great reform. One had been partially damaged during the struggle and was stored safely. The second was kept in Vulcan's museum of history, fully intact; the third had been lost. Legend had rumored that it was taken away by a pilgrim and lost somewhere within the Romulan Empire. Now he knew that legend was fact.

When he had noticed the commander gazing at the sword he had no idea of its antiquity. He had assumed that it was merely a family heirloom which all Romulans kept. To now find out that she had within her possession an original Sorran sword would bear closer examination, he thought as he continued to gaze at its beauty.

Replacing it within the carved scabbard, he looked over at the bundle which lay at the child's feet. Carefully laying the ancient sword aside, he retrieved the satin bag and slowly opened it. Although not as grand as the first item, the contents proved very helpful in establishing the child's identity.

Set within a hand-carved plaque was a simple Romulan inscription. Although he could not decipher its meaning, he felt certain it was a family name, for below the characters was a bronze reptile, obviously the symbol of the family lineage. Along with this finely crafted plaque was a small, cube-shaped crystal.

Fascinated, he held the cube up to the light and was surprised to see shapes forming. Once he realized it was a holograph he patiently waited until the forms took shape.

Tal was in the full dress uniform of a Romulan officer. In front of him and wearing a familiar gown sat the Commander's smiling form. With a smile such as he had never before seen, she cradled a small infant in her arms.

Looking from the holo to the child he began to see the resemblance. He recognized her delicately shaped eyes and firm chin. There were no features that could be attributed to Tal, but there were other familiarities, although he could not as yet identify them.

The computer behind him beeped. *"Spock,"* her voice called out.

"By now you have found the cargo, and perhaps understand its value. This child is my son. He is one point three standard years of age. His existence has always been a secret, but as he ages this becomes increasingly difficult." Her voice sounded weary. *"On my home planet, his life would be one of constant sorrow, for his blood is not fully Romulan. Among us, this alone would be cause for death. Were he to be examined they would find traces of Human characteristics. His life would be forfeit in the laboratories. I would not allow this, not for my child."*

At her words he looked down at the still, small form.

"You stated once," she said, *"that you hoped that we had exchanged something more permanent. Your hopes were predicated, Spock. This child is mine, mine and yours."* In time with her words, the life support equipment began to revive the child, and he began to wake from his artificial sleep.

"It is my hope, Spock, that you will care for this child, raise him as I am unable to. Tal and I have claimed him as ours, but the first time he is brought under a medical scanner, this lie would be discovered. It was our decision to send him to his father, into the Federation. With you he will have the best chance for life, for a future unblemished by prejudice. All that I leave to him are the few relics of my family. They have been passed through my family since the first pilgrimage. It is my hope that he learns to cherish and respect them as I have."

The voice paused and the child opened his eyes.

"Fear not, Spock, that another child of yours will be born into a hunted or tortured life in the Romulan Empire. By the time this message reaches you, I shall be dead. Tal and I have made this choice freely. There was no other way for us to keep our honor within the warrior code."

Spock felt a profound respect for this woman and for Tal, who had given all out of loyalty to his commander, out of love. The tape was not finished. *"I am reminded*

of a Terran poem. I discovered it during my month aboard the Enterprise.

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me

I can not remember the rest, but for some reason these lines stand clearly in my mind. Perhaps it is due to the fact that even now I do not feel prepared for death. But I know that this is the only solution. With Tal's strength to carry me through, I shall endure, and I shall remember this poem as I am carried into death."

Looking from the screen she seemed to momentarily lose control. Then in a feat worthy of admiration from any Vulcan she masked her fears and turned back to the screen.

"My son carries Terran blood, and I have come to appreciate the finer qualities of this race. I pray that he will learn to respect his Romulan heritage as well. Perhaps in his time there will be fewer differences between our two nations. It is merely a dream I have. All beings have a right to such dreams." Her breath caught in a sob. *"Take care of my son, Spock. His is the only one I have and all that I leave to the future."*

The tears now flowed freely down her cheeks.

He then heard the tiny tone that indicated that the tape had played to its end. As the sounds of the shuttle filled his ears he closed his eyes. Kneeling by the cubicle he allowed the sorrow to wash through him, then he looked at the tiny boy.

Blinking from the bright lights, the child stretched as his eyes opened fully. As he became aware of the strange surroundings, his small features bunched into a frown as tears welled into his eyes. After swallowing, he began to cry in earnest.

Spock carefully picked up the small boy and placed the stuffed animal in his grasping hands. Moving slowly, he carried the child to the pilot's seat. He held the boy in his lap and hugged him gently as he brushed his soft black hair. Realizing that no harm would come to him, the child began to look around curiously as he sobbed more softly.

Looking out at the black void of space he gently rocked the small body.

Because I could not stop for Death,
He kindly stopped for me;
The carriage held but just ourselves
*And Immortality.**

he said out loud.

Lying under him, she felt the beaded moisture roll down his back. It seemed fitting that their last moments together be spent like this. At least in this manner there would be no pain. All they would feel would be one intensive orgasm before the poison took effect and pulled them into death.

All that was needed to trigger the poison which they had already introduced into their system was a rapid heart rate and an increase in body temperature. At the rate that they were going she knew that it would be soon. The only thing she regretted was not being able to see the faces of the centurians when they found their commander and subcommander dead, permanently locked together in love.

How she wished to see the expression on her father's face when they told him that his only child and heir was dead, her living son still missing. For a Praetor the last missing heir was a curse beyond description, for at any time the child could return to make a claim to the title. This more than anything would drive her father, the Praetor, mad. And there was nothing he could do.

* Emily Dickinson, The Chariot, 1890.

He had tried to secure his title by sending each of his children into the military, into dangerous occupations and sectors. All of his sons had been killed honorably and she was the only child left. She had outwitted every challenge, proving her strength.

Her father's spies must have discovered the child and passed the information on to him. The search had begun, causing talk and speculation throughout the Romulan Empire. He had never suspected that the child might be aboard her fighter ship.

Tal had given everything for her, she realized. He refused a commission and had backed her rise in the military with his loyalty. Despite her fling with Spock he had remained with her, and when she told him that she carried the child of another, he chose to think of it as hers alone. Although he had known who the father was, he never said a word. Instead, he accepted the child as his own.

His presence at the birth gave him this right, she realized. He had been there, he had held her and helped her when the pain was overwhelming, and it was his hands that caught the child as it dropped from her, his hands that severed the cord of life and helped the infant to breathe.

They had both known the dangers of this child's existence. The fact that it was the child of her body would encourage her father to destroy it. Had the identity of the father been known it would have cost all their lives. The child would have lived, for a time, in a laboratory.

She had seen such places, she and Tal. Places where half-breed Romulan children were kept, mewling creatures who had been reduced to pitiful sights by the inhumane experiments of the scientists under her father's command. She and Tal had vowed that this would never happen to their child. The child would die at her hand first. But they had managed to avoid this and kept him a secret, until Spock had fallen into her hands and the contingency plan had been feasible.

The colonists had befallen an unfortunate accident, and all of those who had seen Spock were dead, as were any of the crew who had laid eyes on him on board her ship. No one could now testify to his presence, no one was left to suspect that the child had gone to the Federation.

She thought of her gifts and wondered briefly if her son would understand their true meaning. More importantly, could he find within them the answers to his many questions as she had been able to. It was for this reason that she gave them to him. She had no other possessions which would explain to him who his Romulan people were. At least within the Federation he would have a part of her with him.

The sword and scabbard would show to him the perfect dichotomy of the beauty and cruelty of her people. The bronze family crest would show that he was of noble blood line, the first to colonize and set up the structure of the Empire. Although the holograph taken a week after his birth held no significance, she had agreed with Tal and included it with the other items. Someday he might wish to see the beauty of his mother. Tal had argued, but she hoped that instead of her he saw the image of a man who, for a short time, was his father. Tal had risked his very life for the child, and had later surrendered it. He was an honored warrior who had given much for the future of their son, and their people. Someday her son would know this and understand that the price for Romulan honor is high.

With this thought she wrapped her legs more tightly about Tal, responded more violently to the pressures of his body. He was not Spock, but he had brought her pleasure, and more of that than many of her people ever discovered.

Tal groaned, gave one hard thrust, and stiffened as he reached his climax. He went suddenly limp, collapsed against her as her own body stiffened with pleasure and her climax took over.

The sensations overwhelmed her and she felt a heat coursing through her veins, consuming her body and her being. It seared her heart and pulled her into a darkness she would never leave. Her last sensation was the recognition of Tal's weight on hers and the thought swept through her that perhaps he had fallen asleep, was not dead, and they would soon wake from this nightmare. But it was death, an eternity of sleep, she and Tal existed forever, as closely as two people can be.

Darkness reigned.

REUNION

by Larry D. Kirby III

Dr. Leonard McCoy sat in his office chair, staring at the wall in silent contemplation. Lost in thought, he failed to notice Captain James T. Kirk when he first entered the cluttered room. For a moment, the captain stared down at his friend, then a frown of concern crossed his face.

"All right, Sawbones, what's your beef?" Kirk demanded in his best Iotian accent. McCoy looked up at him, but failed to respond to the jibe. The captain perched on the edge of the desk and studied the doctor.

"Bones," Kirk said after a moment, "ever since we were ordered to drop off emergency agriculture supplies here at Calpurnia IV, you've been moping around like you've lost your best friend. Want to tell me about it?"

McCoy looked at the captain, as if considering a sarcastic response, then sighed quietly. He stood and turned to face the opposite wall, pretending to study one of several framed medical certificates there. Finally he spoke.

"Do you know what the residents of Calpurnia IV call their colony?" he asked.

"I have no idea," Kirk responded, "I could call Spock on the bridge ...."

"Never mind," McCoy replied. "They call it 'Dixie.' It was settled not long after the Eugenics Wars by Southerners who were against reunification with the United States."

"Oh, yes," Kirk said thoughtfully, "with the whole world on the verge of one government, a small group of fanatics wanted to be totally independent."

"Hardly fanatics, Captain," McCoy bristled. "When your beloved American government rolled over and played dead to Khan's demands, the southern and western states refused. Khan invaded; we held him off."

"'We,' Doctor?" Kirk interrupted, an amused look on his face.

"We!" McCoy repeated emphatically. "Three of my ancestors died during the Second Burning of Atlanta. And while all this fighting was going on, the U.S. government sat back and watched, even allowed Khan free passage through its territory. Then when the fighting was over, the U.S. insisted that the new world government recognize the south and west as part of its territory." McCoy's voice was rising; he had turned to face the captain and his face had reddened.

"Take it easy, Bones," Kirk pleaded, only half seriously, "no need to get so upset. That's all history now."

"Not all of it is history," McCoy replied, but his voice grew calmer. "Some of the original colonists here were relatives of mine. Had the South not needed medical personnel so badly, my great-great grandfather would have emigrated here also." Now his voice got quieter. "And twenty years ago, someone close to me came here to start a new life."

Kirk recognized the sudden pain in the voice of his old friend and was silent. Dr. McCoy sat down heavily in his battered chair before continuing.

"Before I married Ariana," McCoy said quietly, "I used to spend a good deal of time with her at my father-in-law's house in South Carolina. She had a younger sister, Jennifer, who flirted with me whenever I came for a visit." McCoy paused, and a faraway look came over his face. "I was twenty, she was only sixteen. I

thought she was just flirting."

"She was in love with you," Kirk said, realizing McCoy didn't want to say the words.

McCoy sighed deeply. "Three weeks after Ariana and I were married, Jennifer left home and applied at the Calpurnian consulate for permission to emigrate."

"But if she was only sixteen, and alone ...."

"This was two years later," McCoy said impatiently, "and she was a direct descendant of General McCarter."

"Richard McCarter?" Kirk asked, impressed in spite of himself. "The man who beat Khan in the Battle of Broken Tanks?"

"Yes," McCoy replied, "and the man who founded the Calpurnian colony. With him as an ancestor, Jennifer had no trouble emigrating."

"I'm surprised the Federation courts didn't send her back," Kirk said.

McCoy laughed. "Jim, you'd better brush up on your history. Technically, Dixie isn't a member of the Federation. They've thwarted every attempt to bring them in. And with their close ties to the Belindans, not to mention the Vulcans, the Federation can't force them to join."

Suddenly Kirk understood McCoy's problem. "You're afraid to see her," he said. "All this talk has just served to cover up the fact that you're afraid to see her." He stared down at the doctor, "You haven't seen her since she left Earth, have you?"

"No," McCoy confirmed. He rose again, "But I'm going to see her now. I talked to her last night over ship's communications. She's been widowed for a long time. She has a small farm near New Atlanta, and she's invited me to spend the night and meet her kids." He glanced at the captain. "With your permission, sir," he added sourly.

Kirk grinned. "You can't use me as an excuse. I'll have Mr. Scott beam you down personally."

McCoy grinned, although weakly. "I do want to see her," he said. "But twenty years is a long time, and so much has happened."

"Don't worry about it," Kirk reassured him. "Just use some of that old Southern charm. Gets 'em every time."

McCoy's sarcastic response was interrupted by Uhura's voice over the intercom, calling Kirk to the bridge. It was a minor matter, but one requiring his personal attention. He left, leaving McCoy staring down at his desk -- staring down at an old, faded photograph.

Jennifer was tall, nearly meeting his own six-foot height. She had blond hair, worn long, and piercing blue eyes that earned her the nickname 'Bright Eyes' from him. He remembered her pale complexion, now undoubtedly darkened by the hot Calpurnian sun.

He ran a hand self-consciously through his graying hair. As he began to gather up a few things from his office, he wondered how he would look to her. He thrust the thought away furiously.

But the thought kept returning.

★

The transporter materialized him in the bright sunlight of a Calpurnian afternoon. He shielded his eyes with a hand, waiting for them to adjust. As his pupils slowly contracted, he looked around to get his bearings. He was standing by the side of a well-traveled dirt road, facing a "driveway" that led up to a small house. The house appeared to have been built from local wood, and had been added to several times. Surrounding the house were fields. *Corn*, he thought, *honest-to-God corn! And soybeans! And ... watermelons?* Close to the house were a number of outbuildings, and scattered among them a number of very tall shade trees. He felt like he was home.

From the opposite side of the road a young boy came out of thick woods. He spotted McCoy, and walked towards him. He looked to be about eight, slender, with

disheveled blond hair and a ready smile.

"You must be Len," the boy said, "only I'm supposed to call you Dr. McCoy. Are you really from outer space?"

McCoy laughed, and leaned over to face the boy. "I'm from Georgia," he said smiling, "I just work in outer space." He made a mental note to tell Jim the boy's question -- the captain would get a kick out of it.

"My name's Robert," the boy said gravely, holding out his hand. "It is an honor to meet you, sir."

"It's an honor to meet you, also," McCoy replied, shaking the small hand.

"I'll take you up to the house," Robert said, pulling the doctor to his feet. Mom'll brain me if I leave you out here in the sun."

McCoy followed the child up the driveway, his heart beginning to race as they neared the house. In just a few moments he would see her. Could he see just her, or would he see Ariana and feel the pain of their breakup all over again?

The boy pulled him to the bottom of a short set of steps that led up to a wide porch. As he started to climb them, a door opened and Jennifer appeared.

She was older, but the years had been kind. A pretty girl had grown into a mature woman, not beautiful, but attractive. Her blond hair was cut short now, bleached almost platinum by the sun, and she was deeply tanned. Her dress was simple, low-cut but somewhat long. The light blue of the dress matched her eyes.

"Hello, Len," Jennifer said, her eyes lighting up the way he remembered.

"Hello, Bright Eyes," he smiled, his apprehension at the meeting vanished. "You look beautiful!"

Jennifer smiled. "Then why did you marry my sister?" she grinned, then threw herself into his arms, almost knocking him down.

He hugged her tightly, fighting the tears that welled up in his eyes. He smelled sunshine in her hair, felt the smoothness of her cotton dress as she pressed herself against him. Then he heard a slight, embarrassed cough behind her.

"Oh," Jennifer said, a blush coming to her face, "I'm sorry, Leonard, I haven't introduced you yet." She stepped to the side, keeping one arm around him tightly. "This is my older son, Richard. You've already met Robert."

Descending the wooden steps to offer a firm hand was a tall, muscular youth of about eighteen. Blond like his mother, his hair was close cut, and McCoy realized with a start that he was in military uniform.

"Pleased to meet you, sir," the young man responded over the handshake. "Mother has told us a lot about you."

McCoy blushed. He wanted to change the subject quickly. "Jennifer didn't tell me you were in the service," he said.

"Home guard," the boy replied, then grinned. "We were activated when the Enterprise entered orbit around Dixie. We're on alert in case y'all land troops."

"Troops!" McCoy exclaimed, "What kind of damn fool idea is that! We came here to --"

"To deliver supplies that we desperately need," Richard interrupted, the grin never wavering. "But our High Command is more than a little paranoid. After all, we do have the single largest supply of dilithium in this sector of space. And we're only eleven parsecs from the Romulan Neutral Zone." He stood to the side, motioning him inside the house. "But let's go inside. It's hotter than a Vulcan in Pon Farr."

"Richard!" Jennifer exclaimed. "You know I don't allow that kind of talk! Especially in front of Robert!"

"What's Pon Farr?" the small boy asked, tugging at McCoy's uniform sleeve.

"Never mind!" Jennifer replied firmly. McCoy had involuntarily shuddered at the memories the words brought back, then was curious as to where the older boy had heard them. But at the look on Jennifer's face, he thought better of asking.

The four of them entered the house, which McCoy was surprised to discover was air conditioned. He was led to a comfortable sofa, where Jennifer sat down next to

him, and the two boys sat in faded chairs on opposite sides of the room. McCoy was very aware of Jennifer's presence next to him. She was everything he had remembered.

The afternoon passed as the two discussed their youth back on Earth, and what had happened to them since. McCoy found the two boys fascinated by the minor tales he told of his Starfleet adventures, but noticed they were refraining from the barrage of questions he had expected. They boys were extremely polite, and very intelligent. McCoy found himself thinking of Joanna, his daughter, and wistfully recalled her growing up to Jennifer and the boys.

As evening shadows began to creep across the hardwood floor, the boys asked to be excused, and went into the back of the house. A moment later they returned with overnight bags packed.

"Going somewere?" McCoy asked.

"Mom is letting us stay over at some friends'," Richard replied. "She said y'all would need some time alone to talk." McCoy felt his face redden, but then realized that Jennifer would not want to talk about Ariana in front of the boys. McCoy exchanged goodbyes with them, and waited uncomfortably while Jennifer saw them out the door. He dreaded talking about his ex-wife, but knew it was unavoidable.

When the boys had gone, Jennifer came back to the sofa and sat down beside him. He was close enough to detect a faint scent of perfume. He caught her eyes; they were the same bright blue he had remembered, eyes that seemed so innocent and child-like.

"How is Joanna?" Jennifer asked. She let her arm rest on the back of the sofa, almost touching his left shoulder.

"Fine," McCoy replied, tearing his eyes away from hers. "She's in Starfleet Nursing School. She should graduate next year."

"You must be very proud of her," Jennifer said.

"I am," he replied, then laughed. "Ariana wasn't too pleased with Joanna's decision to follow in her father's footsteps."

"Ariana wouldn't be too happy with anyone doing anything she didn't approve of," Jennifer said bitterly. She looked at McCoy searchingly, letting her hand come to rest on his shoulder. "Do you still think about her very much?"

"Once in a while," he admitted, "but the pain is mostly gone. At least I got over loving her."

"That's good," Jennifer smiled, then rose to her feet. "Let me fix us a couple of drinks."

"Don't go to any trouble," McCoy protested, starting to rise. Jennifer motioned him back down.

"No trouble," she insisted. She crossed the room to a small cabinet and returned with a small bottle and two glasses.

"What is it?" he asked, eyeing the liquid as she poured a generous amount into the glasses.

"It's green," she replied, then laughed. "Green <u>what</u>, I'm not sure. Ben bought it." This was the first time she had mentioned her deceased husband.

"I wish I could have met him," McCoy said, taking a small sip from the offered glass. It was sweet and definitely alcoholic.

"You would have gotten along fine," she replied. "The two of you were a lot alike. I guess I saw a lot of you in him." Jennifer sipped from her glass and smiled. "I was so crushed when Ariana told me the two of you were getting married. You know, I was madly in love with you back then."

"I didn't know that then," he answered.

"Would it have made a difference?" she asked. There was a moment of awkward silence, then she smiled. "Unfair question, huh?"

He dropped his eyes for a moment, then caught her eyes and smiled. "I was attracted to you," he admitted, "very much. Ariana used to accuse me of paying too much attention to you when the three of us were together."

"I used to be so shy," Jennifer said. "Maybe if I could have told you the way

I felt ...."

"Shy?" McCoy smiled, "You were the biggest tease in Calhoun County!"

"Not really," Jennifer smiled, "I did that to cover my nervousness when you were around." Her voice trailed off, and her eyes fastened on his. Moving ever so slowly, she leaned over and kissed him gently. McCoy froze, his heart beginning to race. She pulled away slightly, then leaned back to kiss him again, this time firmly, letting her arms slide around his neck. He took her in his arms and returned the kiss, feeling the heat rise between them.

"You don't know how often I dreamed of kissing you," she whispered, pulling away slightly, letting her fingers toy with the hair at the back of his neck. He brushed a blond strand out of her eyes and smiled.

"When I heard we were coming here," he said softly, "I knew I had to see you. But I was afraid you wouldn't want to see me." She kissed him again, then nuzzled his ear. He felt his body responding to her, and his position on the couch suddenly became uncomfortable.

All at once the years seemed to melt away, and they were kids again. But this time Ariana wasn't there to blind him with her cultured manner. This time the simple country girl, so unlike her sister, found that part of him that had never left the red Georgia clay.

He kissed her passionately, letting his hands roam over the firm muscles in her back and shoulders. He found the seam of her dress and pulled it apart, letting his hands move under the fabric to caress her smooth skin. She moved closer to him, thrusting her breasts against his chest, and he could feel her nipples becoming erect against him.

"Lenny," she moaned against his neck, "Lenny let's go into my room." He reluctantly let her pull away from him, then stood up as she rose breathlessly to her feet.

For a moment he thought of sweeping her off her feet and carrying her into the bedroom, but he resisted the urge. With his luck, his back would give out; besides, that was Jim's style, not his.

He followed her down a dimly lit hall into a small bedroom. The setting sun shone faintly through the single window, casting a reddish light through the room. Jennifer walked over to a small dresser, turned to face him, and began disrobing.

McCoy stood watching her as if paralyzed as she pulled the straps off her shoulders and let the dress slide slowly to the floor. She took two steps toward him, stepping out of the sandals she was wearing, then sat on the edge of the bed to remove her panites.

"Aren't you going to get undressed?" she smiled, "or have you changed your mind?"

The sound of her voice broke him out of his trance-like state. He pulled the blue uniform shirt over his head and tossed it carelessly over a chair by the door. Then he sat on the chair to remove his boots. He fumbled once with the seam, and felt like a teenager with his first girl.

When he was down to his briefs, he walked over to sit on the side of the bed. He stared down at her, seeing her breasts rise and fall with each breath she took. He started to reach for her, but hesitated.

"Jennifer, are you sure?" He had to ask, and at the same time felt silly. Neither of them were children any more.

"I'm sure," she whispered quietly. "I want this very much. I always have." She reached out to touch his arm, then with a sudden giggle pulled him down on top of her. He fell over her heavily, then raised up on one elbow. She giggled again.

"Poor Lenny," she smiled up at him. "Your chivalry is getting in the way."

He grinned. "Be thankful I don't take lessons from my captain," he warned her with mock sternness, "or by now we'd be arguing over who sleeps on the wet spot."

She returned the grin. "I don't intend to let you sleep for a while yet," she replied, then pulled his face down to hers.

He kissed her deeply, letting his tongue work its way between her slightly parted lips. She returned this kiss, letting her tongue intertwine with his, her mouth working furiously against his own.

McCoy shifted his position so he could let his hand roam the smoothness of her body. Her skin was firm, slightly flushed in the cool air of the bedroom. He cupped her breasts, letting his fingers toy with the nipples until they became erect.

He trailed a line of kisses down into the hollow of her neck, then further down to her breasts. He took a nipple between his teeth, gently nibbling on it, and heard her moan with pleasure. His right arm still cradling her head, he let his left shift over the smoothness of her belly, until his hand brushed the soft hair at the junction of her legs.

Jennifer gasped when he slid a finger down her wetness, and reached down to guide him on. Responding, he rubbed her clitoris until she was thrusting her hips up on the bed, then let his finger slide into her. She cried out at the intrusion, and her hands around his neck tightened, but she made no move to stop him.

Leonard moved up to kiss her again, and this time it was her tongue that invaded his mouth. Startled, he drew back, then felt sheepish.

"Poor Lenny," she said again, grinning, her breath heavy against his ear, "Ariana always said you had trouble with aggressive women." He started to protest, but she gave him no chance. She covered his lips with her own, kissing him deeply while moving her body away from him. Then she began moving down his body, planting kisses on his warm flesh. She let her teeth slide against his nipples, creating a mixture of pain and pleasure.

Then, quickly, she rolled over his thigh, positioning herself between his legs. She slid his briefs off, and tossed them away. His erection was inches from her face, and she looked up at him smiling.

"Bright Eyes grew up, Lenny," she smiled. "She's a big girl now." Her tongue flicked out to touch him, and he felt a wave of warmth rush over him at the contact. Then she moved her head up until it was positioned over his shaft.

Her lips parted, and she slid the length of him into the moistness of her mouth. Leonard fought to keep from thrusting up at her as she took all of him in, then slowly began moving up and down on his erection. She let her teeth nip at him. His blood began to boil, and he felt the pressure begin to build up in his groin.

Jennifer felt it also. "Not just yet," she whispered, pulling away from him. Leonard moaned with frustration. With a haste that betrayed her own passion, Jennifer moved on top of him, grasping him firmly in her right hand. She guided it between her thighs, then moistened the head of his shaft with her own juices. Then she removed her hand and let the length of him slowly slide into her.

"God," she whispered quietly, "Lenny, if you only knew how many times I dreamed of this." She began moving on him gently, rocking with her hands braced on his chest for support. He reached up to cup her breasts and squeezed them gently. Her eyes were closed, her lips slightly pursed with her arousal.

Jennifer began quickening her motions on him, and Leonard moved with her, rising up to meet her thrusts. He could feel his heart racing, the pressure in his groin was becoming unbearable. Jennifer's fingernails scratched at his chest, and he had to put his hands over hers to stop her.

Leonard felt Jennifer begin moving on him erratically now, and pulled her down to where he could kiss her. She moved her legs to the outside of his, and he had to take over the effort of movement. He kissed her, then she cried out and began to jerk erratically against him.

Leonard held her tightly as her orgasm burned through her, felt her teeth on his neck, and the warmth of tears on his cheek. Then his own orgasm surged through him, and he thrust upward, crushing her to him with all his strength as she cried out in pleasure.

Their movements slowed until they lay quietly in each other's arms, kissing tenderly and holding each other tightly. He cracked his eyes open to see her looking down at him with a dreamy smile on her face.

"What are you smiling at," he asked her, kissing the bridge of her nose. She was silent for a moment, then slowly rolled off him to nestle herself on his right shoulder. The room felt chilly now after their exertions, but he was too content to move to draw the thin blanket up over them.

"I was just thinking," Jennifer murmured, "about how often I'd thought about going to bed with you. When you used to come up to Dad's place, I'd try to get you to notice me. You never did."

"I noticed you," he assured her. "You were always prettier than Ariana."

"Then why did you marry her instead of me?" Leonard didn't know the answer to that one. He realized after a moment that she didn't really expect one. They lay in each other's arms, listening to each other breathe.

"How long can you stay?" she asked finally.

"Just tonight," he replied, and felt her stiffen beside him.

"Will I ever see you again?"

Leonard sat up in the bed, looking down at her tenderly. Her blond hair was disheveled, and there was a thin film of perspiration on her slender body. He reached out to stroke the side of her face, and she reached up to cover his hand with her own.

"I hope we'll see a lot of each other," he said. "I'd like to get to know the boys. But I've got another year to run on my tour."

"A lot can happen in a year," she replied. "You may forget all about me."

"Hardly," Leonard smiled down at her. "I didn't forget you after all this time. I'm not going to do it over the next year."

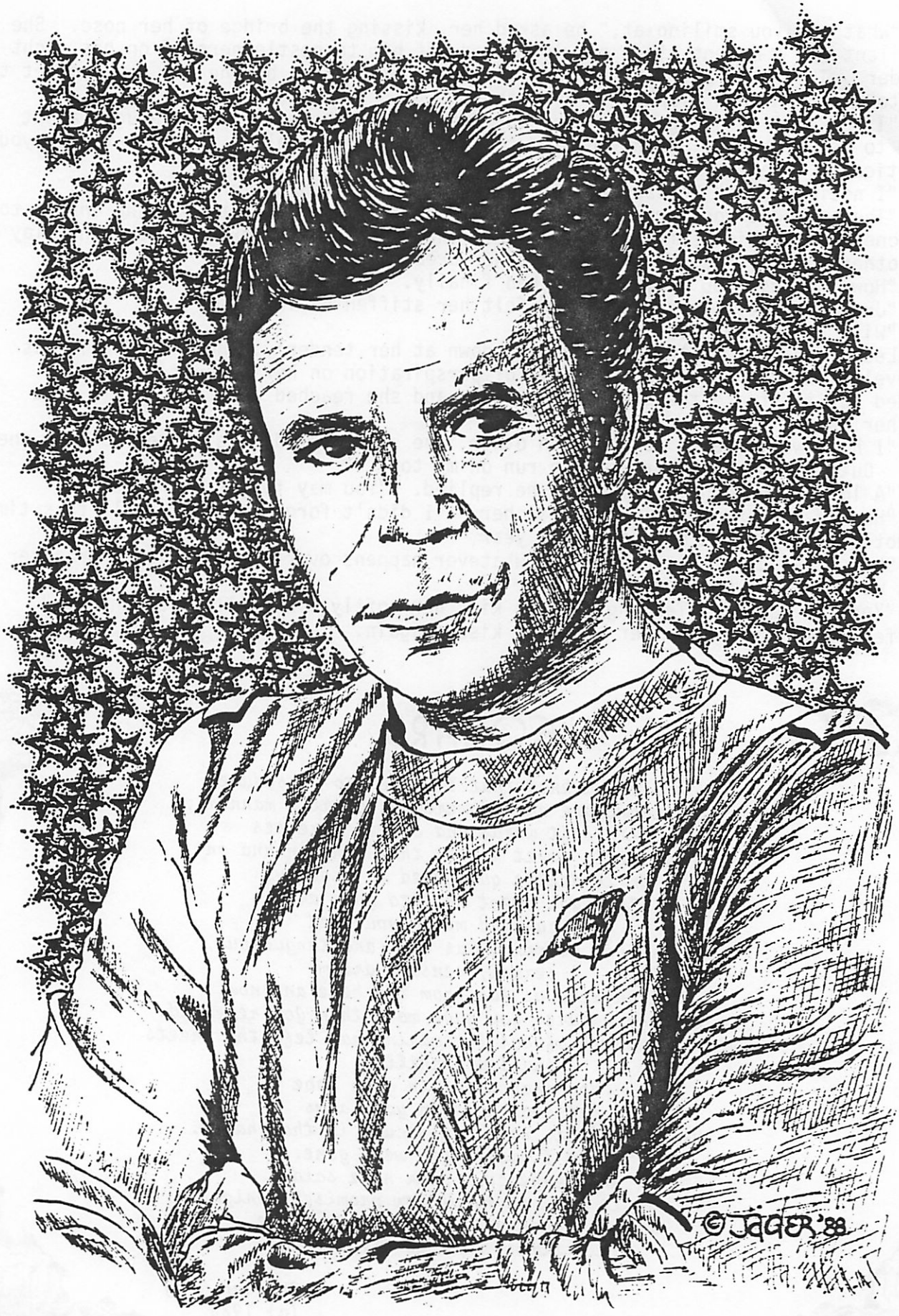
She smiled up at him and said, "Whatever happens over the next year, or after that, we will have had tonight."

"Yes, he replied, leaning down to kiss her softly, "we will have tonight." Jennifer drew him down to her and they kissed again.

LEONARD

How did you know that I wanted to be seduced
With champagne and flowers and courtly manners,
With soft words and softer caresses
And sweet, sweet kisses that went on and on
Until desire quickened to urgency?
Then you swept me into your arms
And carried me to your bed
Where our coupling was slow and languorous,
A sexual, sensual dream
That carried us far from the here and now.
As is your nature, you gave more than you received.
When the warmth of our lovemaking had left the sheets
And I was chilled,
You wrapped me in your robe
And rocked me in your arms
Until I slept, safe and secure in that haven.
When I awoke, you were gone.
An emergency, your note said,
A single rose on my pillow promised tonight
Another journey to our private place.
This time I will do the giving.

-- Deborah Goby
(c) 1988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A Flush of Dignity

by Carolyn McTarrell

James T. Kirk waited impatiently for Dr. Christine Chapel to arrive in the transporter room. He did not want to beam down to an unknown planet without Spock, but the Vulcan was essential to the shipboard translations if they were going to find out why the automatic defense system of the abandoned city was so indiscriminate.

Kirk muttered to himself, "Where the hell is she?" McCoy was tied up with minor accident victims, and Kirk shouldn't have been going at all. Someone more expendable should be sent instead, but one crewman had already been lost, and whenever any member of his crew was hurt, Kirk felt the death in his own soul; he always took such losses as a personal insult. His jaw tightened and hazel eyes glinted with determination. There would be no more injuries -- he would see to it personally!

Chapel's arrival broke Kirk's fierce concentration. "Hurry up, Chris; there are two men down there who need help." As she stepped onto the pads he snapped, "Energize." They sparkled from sight and quickly formed on the hushed, cloud-covered surface of Garnth.

Chapel moved instantly to the wounded men. "They're not badly hurt, sir, but we should beam them up at once --" Her voice choked off suddenly as a dim light enclosed her body, now violently shaking. "Captain!" she screamed, one second before she disappeared from sight.

"Chris!" he yelled, running forward to the spot where she'd been standing. "Damn!" He was now alone with the wounded men. He flipped out his communicator, "Kirk to *Enterprise*. I have injured personnel to transport. Dr. Chapel's vanished; I'll continue searching for her and call you within fifteen minutes. Kirk out."

His insides wrenched and the communicator slipped from his grasp as he too faded from view in the mysterious beam. He dropped into a stone room, and saw Chapel crumpled in the corner of what appeared to be a prison cell. Kirk remained conscious, although his knees were bruised by the rough landing. "Chris," he called, moving slowly and painfully toward her.

He carefully gathered her limp shoulders and turned her, searching her slender figure for obvious injuries. Finding no outward damage, he shook her gently. "Chris?"

"What happened?" she asked, trying to straighten. She glanced furtively toward the dim shadows of the cold room. "Where are we?"

"I don't know," he replied, rising to his feet to check out the door. "Seems secure enough ... I wonder." He moved to what appeared to be water spigots and turned them. "Hmm, smells like food of some sort."

"Wait! Don't try it!" she cried, and tested the liquid with her tricorder. "Edible. In fact, quite nutritious. This mixture supplies every nutrient a Human requires. I wonder if it was produced specifically for us?"

"The important question is, who produced it?" They searched, but to no avail. "Let's get comfortable. Someone has to check up on us. They wouldn't go to the

bother of snatching us only to forget us," he grumbled, dropping to sit heavily, and both sank into their own thoughts.

★

Seven hours passed, according to Kirk's chronometer, and the silence had become increasingly tense. "Captain?" Chapel's voice broke the self-imposed silence.

His head lifted from his knees and his eyes softened. She was nervous, and blurted, "I need to relieve myself." She blushed hotly, but her jaw was stiff with determination.

He nodded as matter-of-factly as he could. "Me, too," and he rose, walking toward what appeared to be a flush drain, set into the hard floor. He turned and smiled charmingly, "Ladies first?" he waved.

She caught her breath at the grin and, not trusting her voice, nodded and moved to the flowing water, pulling at her uniform closures. He swung around hastily and waited for her, then quickly relieved himself when she was finished.

They felt awkward, but had accomplished their goal and soon began to talk in the relaxed atmosphere. With nothing else to do, they continued for hours. Chapel enjoyed getting to know the easy-going, but previously exclusive captain. She became entranced with his quick wit and humor that was always evident, even under such adverse circumstances. She had been enamored of Mr. Spock for so long that even though the Vulcan didn't respond to her, she had failed to notice other men. Now she had time. Always aware of Kirk as a man, she wondered how she'd never noticed the tight body and sparkle of personality that radiated from him.

The very ingrained maleness he exuded had made new female crewmembers want to scream in frustration, for he seldom noticed them in return. Certainly he noticed women as bodies, but seldom their personalities. She reflected on past situations when his special talents had saved them. Kirk was not consciously aware of her changing attitude but he did respond noticeably to the warmer atmosphere. Now speaking with more animation, he kept the dark shadows at bay as they watched night approach from their tiny window.

★

Kirk's head banged the stone wall behind him for a second time as he struggled to keep awake -- a battle he was losing.

Chapel's features softened and she moved to his side, although her muscles were stiff with the cold. *He looks so young, slumped over like that,* she thought, fighting the urge to brush a stray strand of hair back from his smooth face.

She sat awkwardly beside him and the next time his head rolled she slipped her arm around him. Instead of slamming into the hard stone, his head collided with her warm flesh, sliding down against the smooth, welcoming warmth to nestle comfortably against her breast. She wriggled a bit, easing her body next to his, and fell asleep.

Kirk awoke with a jolt. The cold was insidious. He felt a tremor, but it wasn't coming from him. He searched for a moment, puzzled, until he realized that the source was the breast his face was pressed into. He jerked away, waking Chapel with the sudden movement. She continued to shiver. "Is it morning yet?" she asked sleepily.

"No," he answered uneasily. There was just enough light for him to see her large blue eyes gazing peacefully at him. She smiled bravely, their eyes met and held. After a moment she sat up, clutching her arms.

"Grief, it's cold," her teeth beginning to chatter as she spoke.

He laughed, breaking the tension, and drew her closer. "I'll return the favor. We can't survive only to freeze!" She nodded and sank back against his muscled hardness. He murmured warmly into her hair as he rested his chin on top of her head, "Rest as much as you can. If they've seen to our needs so far, there's

no reason to think they'll forget us completely." *I hope,* he added to himself.

She smiled indulgently, aware of the added thought as if he'd spoken aloud. Even though he'd known her for years, his protective nature pulled her closer. She accepted, suddenly feeling very feminine. Taller than many men, she tended to feel intimidating, but Kirk projected strength beyond his size, and she loved the security he gave her. She fell back to sleep, a tiny smile on her lips.

A deep male voice pierced her dreams and with a grunt, Kirk was gone. "Captain!" she screamed, trying to keep her wits while fighting panic. "Captain!" she called again. No answer. She leapt to pace the tiny room, unable to do anything constructive. She was totally frustrated.

Where did he go? ... Will he come back? Her mind refused to visualize what their captors might want with him, and her stomach knotted painfully in rising terror. She paced herself into exhaustion.

She stopped to stare out the cell window. She had judged the day to be past dawn when Kirk materialized with a sickening thud.

Her training allowed her to sublimate her nausea as she moved to his side. Her captain had been tortured, a multitude of small cuts criss-crossing his nude body, covered with massive areas blue from bruising.

He was semiconscious, close to delirium. "Captain!" She cleaned his face with water as best she could, the chill of the water bringing him to awareness.

"Chris?" he gasped hoarsely. "You're all right?"

Tears filled her eyes. As always, his first concern was for the crew. "Relax, try to rest," she murmured, pushing him down. He was attempting to gather his strength and struggled to rise.

"No, stay still, you mustn't move. I can't tell what internal injuries you may have."

He grunted with the effort. "I can tell, believe me! There's nothing internal. My tormentors only meant to hurt ... not to kill."

Her eyes narrowed in anger. Such tactics ripped through her medical training. "Who are they?" she wondered.

"I didn't see them, only androids -- mechanicals. They didn't ask anything. It's as if they just wanted to soften me up a little bit." As he glanced ruefully at his bare body a slow flush crept over the unbruised portions of his skin. But since there was nothing either could do, he shrugged, ever pragmatic, while running his eyes over her own uniform.

"I am sorry. There's nothing of yours that will even cover my shoulders, let alone ...."

She was relieved that he accepted his unclothed condition so well, and her eyes inevitably followed his down the hard body toward his groin. The size of his limp penis caused her eyes to widen and she quickly looked away, feeling her face redden. *After all,* she thought quickly, *I've seen him naked a number of times. It shouldn't bother me now.* He watched her face, and flushed even deeper.

"Captain?" she asked timorously.

"Jim -- call me Jim. As long as we've known each other ... and ... now."

He tried to smile and she nervously moved away, supressing a giggle. "What are we going to do? I'm sorry, Cap-- Jim, I didn't mean ..." she turned and watched his face. She saw more than his physical pain -- she saw his frustrated helplessness, inability to do ... anything. This was the worst torture of all for such a man.

He laid his head back on the cold stone and sighed deeply. "I'm sorry, but I just don't know." He stopped speaking and seemed to slip into sleep.

Chapel moved to check him over. It was easier with the wide eyes closed. She could clinically examine him without further embarrassment. She noted that every inch of his body had the tiny marks on it, even his penis. Lifting it, she studied it closely, then frowned, wondering at the purpose of the abuse. Her hand froze. Suddenly she knew he was awake, but his eyes were squeezed shut, refusing to acknowledge her touch, trying to save them both embarrassment.

Fine -- if he wants to pretend, I'll be happy to go along. She continued her examination with only a slight tremor in her hands, and issued a short report to the tricorder.

She moved back to him, sitting on the icy floor, watching involuntary shivers course his body. "Captain -- Jim!" she called. His eyes opened in response. "You're going to freeze if you just lay there like that. We've got to do something."

His laugh turned into a cough as he grasped her arms to raise himself. I guess we're going to have to cuddle. It'll help a little." He shivered as he slid his bare hips across the floor toward a corner. "Come here," he added as she smiled from across the room. He was recovering. Kirk pulled her down when she drew near, swiftly enfolding her in his shaking arms. She stretched her legs along his, adding warmth.

"Out flat," he ordered gently, and she complied. He rolled her over, fitting himself against her back in spoonlike fashion. His strong arms encircled her breasts as he pulled her sharply into his shaking body. "Chris, I ..." his teeth were chattering so badly he couldn't speak.

"I understand," she said softly and pushed back, warming him more. They waited, hoping sleep would claim them while both minds worked furiously. His was searching for an explanation, a reason, an escape. Hers was also making the attempt, but was too aware of the warmth of the bruised body, the contact tingling over her skin.

Chapel pushed unconsciously harder into his embrace and the grip tightened, offering comfort. Kirk leaned forward, not knowing what he intended, his breath faintly moving her blonde hair.

//THE FEMALE SUBJECT WILL BE EXAMINED NOW.// The dead voice came from nowhere, paralyzing his brain. A scream rent the air as Chapel faded from his grasp. Kirk's features twisted in fury and he sprang to his feet in utter frustration.

He raced to the barred door and for a moment pounded in futile rage against its strength, until practicality asserted itself and he forced himself to wait the interminable time, anger and fear rising.

Chapel dropped back into his existance -- naked. He moaned, seeing the trickles of blood staining her white skin, and he gathered the unconscious woman onto his own bare lap.

Two pieces of cloth fluttered down to them from nowhere and he wrapped the thin material around her. Rising, he fashioned himself a suitable toga, and then pulled her toward a corner and back into his lap where he carefully washed and soothed her tormented flesh to the best of his ability.

She whispered, stirring in his arms, "Captain? Jim? I'm all right. Apparently they gave us both the same treatment. It looks worse than it feels." She gagged once and he winced as she tried to continue. "They appear to be testing our strength, our limits. I wonder how well we've done." She attempted a shaky smile.

"At least they've given us some clothes," he gestured to their new wraps. She sat up slowly, leaning against the cold wall for support.

//THE SUBJECTS ARE TO DRINK! THEY ARE DEHYDRATED.// The voice paused, //THEY WILL BE FORCED IF NECESSARY// it warned.

Kirk moved quickly, "Come on, Chris, let's drink before they feel the need to help." He smiled, helping her gently to her feet. They drank quickly. "That feels better," he said, "How are you now?" His eyes traveled her body lightly.

She flushed under his gaze, clutching the cloth tightly about her. "Much better." Her voice changed in anxiety, "So, where is the *Enterprise*?"

"I don't know." He steadied his voice, "Spock should have found us by now unless ..." his words drifted off as he saw her shudder. "We should move around, if possible. This sitting is getting to me. I think I'll exercise -- it should at least stave off boredom. My injuries don't seem to bother me much now." He began

jogging in place while she watched him, enjoying the lithe muscles ripple easily over the bare skin she could see.

He stopped, suddenly aware of her intense gaze.

"Why did you stop?" she asked, looking puzzled.

"I ... I'm not comfortable in this ... dress," he laughed uneasily, fingering the flimsy material clinging to his thigh.

"Take it off then; that's all right with me," she grinned, hoping to put him at ease.

"That ... would actually make it worse. With no support ... he moved his hand slowly.

Chapel blushed furiously as an image flashed in her mind -- as did Kirk.

"Shit!" he exploded, moving to stare out the window, "we can't just sit here and do nothing," his tone aggressive.

"What else is there to do? Maybe we should tunnel."

"Well, that's a thought," and he was off exploring every crack in the room. "Damn it, there's simply nothing here. We have to rely on Spock."

//A BREEDING PAIR, DO YOU SUPPOSE?//

//POSSIBLY. THAT WOULD BE FORTUNATE.//

Kirk yelled, "Show yourselves. Let us see you!" His eyes flamed with frustrated anger.

//ARE THEY ATTEMPTING TO COMMUNICATE WITH US?// The voice was incredulous.

The colder voice answered, //IT WOULD APPEAR SO. HOW INTERESTING.//

//THE MALE IS QUITE HOSTILE. IT RADIATES PRIMITIVE EMOTION. I WONDER IF WE SHOULD SEPARATE THEM?//

Chapel's stomach flopped as Kirk roughly yanked her closer. He softened his tone. "No, don't. Please ... we will ...." Regretting his earlier fury, he attempted to placate them.

//IT REQUESTS. PERHAPS WE SHOULD RECONSIDER OUR PROGRAM. IF THEY CAN ADAPT SO RAPIDLY, WE SHOULD TEST THEM FURTHER. IT WOULD BE MOST INTERESTING IF WE HAVE CAPTURED A SENTIENT SPECIES.//

//THAT CANNOT BE SO. THEY WERE TAKEN SO EASILY BY THE CITY. ANY BEINGS OF TRUE INTELLIGENCE WOULD HAVE UNDERSTOOD THE WARNINGS.//

Kirk flushed at the insult and blurted, "The city surprised us. We are not accustomed to looking for traps on such a beautiful, unpopulated world."

The voice seemed not to have heard him. //WE WILL WATCH YOU FURTHER. IT IS TIME TO REST. IF YOU ARE TO BE TESTED AGAIN YOU MUST BE CALM. EAT, THEN SLEEP. WE WILL RETURN FOR YOU LATER.//

Kirk could not stop his errant tongue, "What the hell are you going to do with us?" Chapel's arm wrapped tighter around his waist. The silence stretched unbroken. "They're not going to answer, I guess. Now we get to wait again. Come on," he said, pulling her toward the spigots. "You eat and then rest. You need --" He stared at her broken skin with surprise, "That certainly is healing quickly."

"Yes. They applied something healing -- and you as well, I assume." She reached out to touch his swollen bruises lightly and he shivered. "There should be no scars," she commented.

He smiled, "I'm glad. Your skin is ..." he stopped as he raised his hand, brushing a fallen wisp of hair back from her shoulder. Their eyes caught as she gasped in surprise at the warmth of his touch. "Chris," his voice dropped as he watched her closely.

"Jim, is now the --"

He stopped her hesitant words with firm lips. Surprise reverberated between them as he bent her pliant body roughly back over his forearm, persuading her mouth to open and allow his slick tongue entrance.

Her low, sensual moan encouraged him, and he responded by pushing her against the wall. As his mouth warmed, she struggled and managed to slide from under his

grip. "Jim, are you sure? They want this, you know they do. Maybe they even gave you something --" she added with dread, looking into his face. The experience would be physically and emotionally devastating if he was being artificially stimulated.

Kirk steadied his quivering muscles and tried to quell the swelling beneath his toga. He took her shoulders between sturdy hands, "Chris," he whispered, "I'm in control. The only thing I am reacting to is a beautiful woman. One who," he shook her slightly to emphasize his concern, "I've never had the time or opportunity to appreciate. Now --" He brushed her lips softly and beckoned her closer with his smile, waiting for her decision.

The blue eyes darkened, "I --" She couldn't speak. His gaze tightened her throat and stilled her doubts and stirred her body. His mouth moved slowly closer and when she didn't recoil, captured hers aggressively.

His teeth grabbed her lower lip until the sensation weakened her knees, sending electric pulses down her thighs. Her mouth opened to allow his tongue to plunge deep, swiftly.

She gasped and tangled her hands in the silky hair at the back of his head, pulling him deeper into her mouth. His hand ripped the loose wrap from her trembling body, sailing over the flushed skin to stop at the swell of breasts. A nipple rose to push at his palm and he rolled the hardened flesh until she moaned with pleasure.

As Chapel bent her head to bite the warm skin on his chest, she unintentionally pulled his toga off, then bent to retrieve it. Hot hands on her flanks pulled her back quickly into his groin and he gasped with the pleasure of the heat against his straining member.

Kirk turned her as he pushed her down onto the crumpled fabric. "Is the floor too uncomfortable?" he gasped before his mouth enclosed a ripe breast. With reluctance he released it to speak, "Do you want to change positions?"

She smiled. "No, I like dominant men. This is fine," she grinned, "for now."

He barely heard her as he trailed a burning path past her navel. His body was rampant with frustration. The few days of inactivity and the uncertainty of the situation were driving him with an aching desire, giving his mind respite.

He did not want to force her, or rush either of them. He pulled back from her, placing both hands on either side of her head. Hazel eyes searched dark blue and found their answer, and his questing hand, moving over her abdomen, found the physical one as well. The hidden heat between her thighs was slick with wanting and he impatiently nudged her legs wider with his hand as he scooted forward on his knees.

His swollen penis bumping her, he pushed harder, sliding into the tight grasping cave, sinking deeper as her body moved beneath him. He nearly came when she groaned with pleasure.

Her body called him deeper and his hips answered the insistence of her searching hands. His sensual mouth returned to hers as he began to move, deliberately faster ... faster. Her body caught his rhythm and added its own variation, driving him wild.

His explosive release was followed by her own hard climax. Spasming muscles clasped and gripped his still-thirsty phallus. Relaxation followed and he settled to her side, licking and kissing her flushed skin. Her eyes were closed, a tiny smile on her swollen lips. "That was ..."

"Incredible," he finished for her. His breath was still harsh with exertion.

Kirk tugged the cloth from under her and carefully tried to cover her warm flesh. The thin material clung to the hollows and rises at the juncture of her thighs and his hand moved to adjust the cloth, but began instead to knead the flesh beneath. As the warmth spread through them both, he impatiently brushed the flimsy cloth away and her legs parted again in blatant invitation.

The glistening moistness on her tender skin beckoned. Kirk lowered his head, moving his tongue to gently wash away the evidence of their climax and he pushed deeper, finding her physical soul, and sending agonized sweetness screaming up her spine. Her spontaneous cry pleased and excited him to suck harder, calling shudders from her frame and from his own instant thickness. His tongue and teeth continued until with a loud groan she pushed him back, "Slower, please," she gasped, "let me..." breathless, she couldn't continue.

He willingly sank back to the hard floor as her eager mouth sought his rigid penis. Blue eyes absorbed the sight of the scarred, muscular body stretched before her in obvious yearning, and she smiled, taking him carefully into her mouth. The stretch was considerable but she managed it to both their satisfaction.

He was soon writhing with his own rippling sensations. She drew him time and time again to a peak and then let him fall back only to rise again until he growled, biting her most accessible skin and flipped her onto her back. Waiting no longer, he plunged directly into her teasing heat, with an insatiable thrust. His eyes closed in ecstasy as he pumped, his hands holding her arms down by her side. She relished the total possession, sighing as he began faster thrusts, her smiling eyes speaking to him, urging him on. Finally, they collapsed, completely spent, to fall asleep, warm in each other's embrace, oblivious to the creeping cold, and unconcerned for now with the hidden aliens.

★

The dark brown Vulcan eyes pierced Kirk's awareness. "Shit!" Kirk sat up abruptly, causing Chapel to tumble from his embrace. "Spock!" he sputtered, trying to gather the woman to him.

"Dismissed, Lieutenant," Spock snapped at the gawking woman at his side, and waited until the doors hissed shut behind her. "Captain, I am relieved to find you both ..." he paused as his warm eyes examined the prone woman "... so fit. I apologize for taking such a long time to rescue you. There were ... difficulties."

Kirk scrambled beneath his fanny for the cloth and hastily covered Chapel with the only remnant that had accompanied their beam-up. His wide eyes softened as he brushed the delicate skin and he turned protectively to Spock. "Can we get her to Sickbay before she wakens? She's gone through enough, I don't want her --"

Spock interrupted, "I understand, Jim -- completely." He moved swiftly to pick her up. "I shall send some clothes for you ... when I have time."

Kirk couldn't see the tiny Vulcan smile as Spock left.

"Now, Spock, now! Damn!" The doors hissed closed to strand the starship captain, now clothed only in his dignity.

Dawn

Warm, heavenly bodies
entwine as if twin stars
Our sun also rises

-- Ellen Hulley

THE LOGIC OF PASSION

by Jane Land

I was working when T'Sai's summons arrived. She wished to see me immediately, and the matter was urgent. I laid down my chisel and wiped my hands. "Tell the High Master that I will come as soon as I have cleaned myself." I was covered with fine, gritty stone dust.

The messenger left, and as I washed I examined my mind. I had experienced no anger, no frustration at being interrupted. My art now sprang from patterns of reason and logic; it was no longer dependent on emotional inspiration. This piece was difficult and demanding, but I could take up the work when I returned. I felt pride at my ability to master my emotional tendencies, even in the most vital area of my life. Then I caught at my thoughts. No. Pride was as destructive as any other emotion. Pride in my work, pride in my mastery of the disciplines of Gol, these I must overcome. What I did was what was necessary. There was no reason for pride. I resolved to meditate on the matter after I had seen T'Sai.

Before stepping out my door I stopped briefly to examine the piece on which I was working. The abstract shapes had a powerful order to them. They represented the strength of the disciplined mind, a strength I would have been incapable of showing until I came here. All through my years as a student my teachers had warned me against my use of emotional expression in my art. Even in my adult career I had found that a lack of logic weakened my artistic powers. Though I controlled adequately in other areas of my life, I knew that my work would never be what I wished until I could create from reason rather than instinct. That was why I had come to the Masters at Gol.

As I walked to T'Sai's office I wondered what her summons meant, but I did not dwell on the matter. Speculation was illogical. I would learn what she wanted when I arrived. My contacts with T'Sai had been limited. The High Master monitored the progress of all acolytes, but the daily guidance of untrained minds was left to the lesser Masters. T'Sai only worked regularly with those about to achieve Kolinahr. I hoped to become her student soon.

When I entered her office, she was standing behind her desk. Her face was the embodiment in living flesh of all that I was striving to represent in my work.

"Peace and long life," she greeted me gravely. I returned the salute, and exchanged greetings with Seron, my own Master, who stood near the window. "You have made much progress in the disciplines," said T'Sai after a moment.

This time I mastered the pride. "That is true. I have done what I am able to do, but more still remains."

Seron turned to me. "I have discussed your future training with the High Master. We believe that you are almost ready to begin preparation for Kolinahr."

"I am honored."

"There is no reason to be. I state a fact. However ...." He stopped. I waited patiently. "There is a problem of which we have just become aware. We had intended that your work with T'Sai begin immediately, but first ...." He stopped again.

In the silence, I became aware that Seron and T'Sai were both ... not embarrassed, that would be unthinkable, but strangely reluctant to say what was in their

minds. When T'Sai finally spoke, she used an older, more personal form of speech. "Thee is unbonded."

"I am." I had always considered myself fortunate. A genetic defect had made me sterile, and Vulcans, like many humanoids, have a slightly greater population of females. There was no need for me to be subject to the pressure of another's mind, nor the madness of the mating fever.

I was totally unprepared for T'Sai's next words. "There is an unbonded male who has come unexpectedly into his time of mating. Thee is the logical choice to assist him."

In that moment my mind betrayed me. I was shocked, which might be permissible, but I also felt a wave of fear and revulsion, emotions which I had thought long overcome. I knew that T'Sai and Seron could sense my turmoil. T'Sai's eyes narrowed. "We do not ask thee to bond with him. Merely to relieve his physical need and use the power of thy mind to hold him to sanity. It is a small enough thing compared to the life of another sentient being."

I could not speak. Anger joined the storm inside me. 'Merely,' T'Sai had said, but it did not seem a small matter to me. I waited until my voice at least was under control. "Why has a bondmate not been found for him?"

"His first bondmate challenged," said Seron. "It was not expected that he would experience the fever again so soon. Perhaps it is the effect of the challenge, or of his mixed heritage. He is half Human."

Worse and worse, it seemed to me. My mind and body to be used by an alien.... "I sense thy distress," said T'Sai flatly. "Use the disciplines thee has learned, child. Thee is the only unbonded female here. There is no time to find another from outside."

"Why? Surely ...."

"He is already in the plak tow," said Seron. "He waited too long before going to the healers. Illogical."

"Indeed," agreed T'Sai. "Perhaps we were wrong to admit him. It is an unfortunate beginning." She broke off, and she and Seron exchanged glances. They had evidently discussed this earlier. She turned back to me. "We cannot compel thee, but there is no logical reason for thee to refuse."

I did not answer. "Open thy mind to me," said Seron. "Thee has the strength for this. I know it."

He positioned himself for the meld, and as I looked from him to T'Sai, all of my earlier feelings, the fear, the disgust, the anger, were buried by a massive rush of shame. I had failed. My control was a sham and Seron would soon know it.

I used all my techniques to calm the surface of my mind, and I felt the cool, precise, familiar touch of Seron's thoughts.

"So. I had expected this."

"I am ashamed."

"Your shame is no more logical than your other emotions. What exists, exists."

"I had thought myself beyond these feelings."

"You have not been so tested before. You will overcome them."

He led me through a meditative exercise, and when our minds parted I was strengthened. T'Sai was right. I accepted the logic.

"Thee will do well," she said.

"I am ready."

"Thee will see the healers first. There are things thee must know ...." Again the sense of reluctance. "Give him the power of thy reason, child, in this time when he has none."

★

I repeated certain mental exercises over and over in my mind as I stood outside the door of the chamber. The one within needed my assistance. It was necessary and

it was logical. The healers had told me what to expect. My mind would be stronger than his, and there would be only minor physical discomfort. There was nothing to fear. But I suddenly found myself wishing that I at least knew his name. I pushed open the door.

Like so much of the sanctuary, the room was carved from the solid rock, with two small windows looking out from the mountainside. There was a firepot ... and a bed. And a tall figure standing by one of the windows. He turned as the door closed behind me. Even from across the room I could sense the primitive chaos in his mind. He was far into the plak tow, as Seron and the healers had warned me; he was incapable of either speech or rational thought.

I went slowly over to him. "I come to serve thy need." I said, and once again the tide of bitterness rose in me. I forced it down. He was staring at me with the eyes of madness. I summoned all my strength and reached to touch his mind. Even though I had been prepared, I had not imagined what it would be like. Pain .... Fire .... Overwhelming primal need .... It was all I could do not to break away from him, screaming in terror.

And then I had no choice. My words, my touch, and the basic fact of my female presence had penetrated his consciousness. I was wearing only a robe. Hot hands fumbled at it and pushed me down on the bed. I barely managed to retrieve the necessary tube of lubricant given to me by the healers. He tore at his own clothes and they dropped to the floor. His body was gaunt, ribs and hipbones showing clearly through the skin. I knew that he had not eaten for days.

He flung himself onto me with a groan, his body damp with fever-sweat, and thrust blindly, shaking with frustration when he could not find the proper place. I applied the lubricant to his painfully swollen shaft, unable to stop a shudder of revulsion as I touched it. I knew that my dislike would increase his misery, but I could not shut it away entirely. I dutifully shifted my hips and clenched my teeth as I helped him to enter me. He cried out, and thrust hard and fast, his pain actually seeming to grow for a moment before his body arched and dissolved in pleasure.

The healers had warned me that he would need to reach orgasm several times during our first contact, so I was not surprised when he continued to move. The first warm flood was followed quickly by another, and another. I had closed all but the top layer of my mind to him, and was doing my best to project calming images. The feelings below the surface I would have to deal with later.

At last he was sated and rolled off of me, still breathing heavily. When he withdrew I felt sticky semen flow out of me, but I did not dare get up to wash until I was sure he was asleep.

In the bathroom I took stock of my physical condition first. Beyond a burning soreness, there was nothing which washing could not cure. In fact, the physical experience, though certainly unpleasant, had not been so devastating as my shameful fears had anticipated. The act of copulation had been painful at first, but then the pain had actually lessened somewhat. I could see that in time it might be no worse than the stretching sensation of a medical examination. I cleaned myself, and thought briefly of washing him as well, but I was reluctant to touch him. He would wake soon enough. I had no wish to accelerate the process.

I put on my robe again and stared into the flame of the firepot, using it to focus my mind. I now knew that I could cope with this time physically, but mentally .... Beneath its disciplined surface, my mind was still filled with discordant emotions of anger and disgust, and shame at my inability to control. I isolated each emotion, and concentrated on eliminating them one by one.

Anger. I was angry with T'Sai and Seron for putting me in this position. But they had acted logically, to preserve a life, asking nothing of me beyond these few days. I was angry with this man -- I glanced at the bed -- for his condition. But he could not help himself. He would assuredly wish not to be here either, if he had a rational choice. He did not.

Disgust. This was more troubling, and harder to eradicate than anger. Physically, the act was an invasion; mentally, even more so. I had not been in such close physical contact with another person since early childhood. My body would never be entirely the same again. Mental contact I was accustomed to, but with controlled and trained minds, not with a riot of savage emotions. I felt contaminated by the experience, and wondered if the alien, Human part of his mind was responsible. Then I made myself see that my disgust was as illogical as my anger. This too could not be helped. It was the only way.

He was beginning to thrash restlessly in his sleep. His hands searched blindly, and he moaned. After a final moment of meditation, I dropped my robe and went to him. He grasped me tightly as soon as I lay down, but to my surprise he did not try to enter me at once. He pressed me to him, breathing raggedly, and touched my temples. I felt his pain and burning once again, and also his relief at my presence. I was grateful that I had had time to regain control before he touched me. He had not probed during our first mind link; his bodily need had been so overwhelming that it had taken precedence. Now he reached for my mental steadiness and I supplied it.

After a moment he pushed me beneath him, which I was prepared for, but then he did something totally shocking. He bent his head and pressed his lips against mine, and before I could react he had thrust his tongue into my mouth. I could not breathe, and a wave of nausea choked me. What was he doing? I pushed him away violently, and my mind involuntarily screamed panic and revulsion at him. He fell to one side, whimpering in shock at my rejection, and I wiped my mouth with a shaking hand. Then I remembered. That must have been what is called a kiss among Humans. Of course. He was half-Human; he must have either learned the custom or come by it out of instinct.

I looked at him. His body was twisted in pain, and the hurt in his mind must be as great. And I had caused at least some of that torment. He whimpered again, a lost, hopeless sound. An unexpected wave of compassion came over me, and I quickly gathered him close, letting it flow out of me into his consciousness. All of my logic had not banished my negative feelings as thoroughly as did this flood of pity for his misery. I felt his mind and body relax for an instant, and then he grunted in sudden, urgent need.

I found the lubricant and guided him. Though I was still quite sore, it was not so bad this time. I had somehow, I realized, gone from being repelled by his condition to feeling responsible for it, for him. As he moved frantically inside me I tried to remember what the healers had told me about easing him. I tentatively put my arms around him and rubbed his back. He moaned gratefully, his head buried in my shoulder, and climaxed with a soft gasp.

I opened my mind more fully to his thoughts. No ... he was not done yet. Desire was still burning in his mind, and the hot shaft within me was a large as ever. He began to thrust again, and I slid my hand down awkwardly between our bodies. I began to rub his testicles, which I knew were aching unbearably under their burden of unreleased seed. My touch was both agony and exquisite pleasure to him. He lifted his head, cried out wildly, and ejaculated again and again, driven by the gentle pressure of my fingers.

When he was spent, he collapsed across me, his ribcage expanding in great breaths. It was a long time before he moved off of me, but though he was heavy I did not hurry him. At last, when I thought that he slept, I tried to sit up, but he stopped me. *"Do not leave!"* It was tinged with panic, but it was the first coherent thought I had received from him. This too the healers had warned me of. He would want the reassurance of my presence, even when temporarily satisfied, and even as some semblance of reason returned to his disordered brain. I settled down again, and he molded my body to his before falling truly asleep.

I sighed. I was not too uncomfortable, but nevertheless it was a daunting thought that the fever would continue for at least eight more days. I composed

myself for meditation as well as I could under the circumstances. My mental state was strangely turbulent. I was still attempting to subdue unruly emotions with the discipline of logic, but the emotions were different now. The anger and disgust were gone. To my surprise, I could find almost no trace of them. Instead, there was compassion, protectiveness, even tenderness. Positive emotions. I was shocked at the thought. Emotions were not, and could not be positive. By their very nature they were destructive, negative. Logic .... But logic had not helped. It had not helped me, and it had not helped him. The anger and disgust had not yielded to reason, but to compassion. Good emotion driving out bad .... I was disturbed by the idea, but I allowed myself to pursue it nonetheless. Would T'Sai and Seron disapprove? But they were not here, in this room, in this bed. I was, and I would use what tools I had, even emotion, to deal with the situation. Perhaps, I thought defiantly, heretically, in this place there were some things emotion could do which logic could not.

He stirred next to me, and I touched his mind lightly, reassuring him of my closeness. That seemed to be all he needed at this moment; he sighed and went back to sleep.

★

In the next days I put my theory into practice, and it worked well. We slept and woke and slept again, and I was there, comforting, whenever he needed me. He would push against me sometimes, even when I was sleeping, and it was no longer painful, or even strange, to fit our bodies together and hold and stroke him until he achieved release. Even his occasional desire to kiss me was tolerable. It became an odd, timeless life in which nothing existed outside this small chamber.

On our third day together I got up to wash, which I tried to do when he could spare me. When I came out of the bathroom he was still asleep. He lay on his back, uncovered, one arm flung out, and I studied him. For the first time I realized that he was beautiful. At first I had found his body repulsive, then I had known his pain and the need to ease it, but now my artist's eyes were caught by his form.

There is no tradition of the nude in Vulcan art. Though I had seen numerous works from other planets, until three days ago I had never seen a living naked male. Now my gaze travelled the length of him in wonder. The strong but sensitive face, the patches of soft hair, the beautiful bone structure, the graceful hands. He was too thin, but even that gave his form a spare, angular beauty.

The now familiar but still slightly shocking feelings of tenderness and compassion welled up in me again, accompanied this time by a sort of lightheaded, breathless achiness. I wondered apprehensively if I was becoming ill. That would be most unfortunate. It suddenly seemed to me that it would be a good idea to sponge him down. He had thrown off the covers in his sleep; the cool water would feel good on his fevered skin.

I searched and found a basin. I filled it, grateful that the bathroom was equipped with water rather than sonics. Starting with his face I wiped him, washing away the sweat and semen, studying the shape of him. Muscles lying over bones, bound by tendons, veins faintly visible beneath smooth-textured skin, the rise and fall of his chest as he breathed, the quick, steady beat of his pulse. I hesitated a little over his half-swollen genitals, knowing that my attentions would arouse him, but he needed to be cleaned, and after all, I had touched him often enough during our mating. Reluctance was illogical. A faint amusement -- another emotion -- flared in my mind at this unlikely resurgence of logic.

As I performed my task I was aware of the heavy, musky odor of his body, which the water could not entirely eradicate. I had not thought about it before; the scent had been a part of the unreality of the last few days. Pheromones, I thought. It had not come to my mind until now, but the healers had spoken of this. The smell of the male secretions supposedly helped the female to relax and made her task easier. Perhaps they had been right.

I moved the cloth gently over his penis and scrotum. Almost at once the shaft throbbed under my hand, and the sac tightened. Odd. I was not feeling relaxed now, but neither was I feeling tense. I was feeling .... I wondered again if I was becoming ill. I did not know what I was feeling. There was a fluttering deep inside me, and I was strangely unwilling to take my hand away.

His eyes opened, and he took a deep, shuddering breath as he became fully erect. I dropped the damp cloth quickly, but he captured my hand and brought it back, rubbing it gently up and down the shaft, sighing with pleasure, while he lifted his other hand to my face. He seemed more aware, both of himself and of me, than he had been before. The desire was still great, but the pain and madness were almost gone from his eyes and his mind. His gaze swept over my body and my skin felt immediately sensitized, though nothing was touching it. My mental sensations were even stranger. What I had felt before had been comprehensible, even when not welcome. This was ....

He touched my feelings, and there was sudden surprise in his mind. He had not seen this in me before. But then I saw that it was less unknown to him than to me. Beyond his need and his surprise there was an unmistakable surge of knowledge, and even delight. *"Yes,"* he sent to me, his mind growing surer. *"This is as it should be."*

"I ... I do not know ...."

"You will see." He pulled me down on top of him. I breathed quickly, needing air. He ran his hands over me, and my body began to ache, but not with pain. I reached to cling to his mind, as he had previously clung to mine, and I saw what was happening. The overall ache had localized itself between my legs. *"You have felt my desire, my need,"* he told me. *"This is your own."*

"But there is no pain!"

"Nor is there for me any longer."

"I have never .... I am not sure ...."

"You have aided me. I still need thee, but I also wish to repay thee." He turned me on my back, stroking my body slowly. *"May I?"* His lips touched the side of my neck.

"Please ...." I was making soft involuntary noises. I did not know if I was asking him to stop or to continue.

His mouth was moving down now, brushing across my breast, fastening suddenly on my nipple. I felt the hot wetness of his tongue against it and the ache between my legs became consuming. I almost cried out in fear. The healers had not prepared me for this.

"Do not be afraid." For the first time since we had been together his mind was steadier than mine. His hand moved between my thighs to the most sensitive spot, and my body responded with a will of its own, pushing against him, demanding that he continue and continue ....

"I need thee!" My thoughts formed without my will. We were both breathing in rough gasps. *"I need thee now!"*

"As I need thee ...." He shifted, and I felt the tip of his penis probing, searching for its haven. The last shreds of control slipped from my grasp, and I had not even the wish to retain them. I heard myself growling as I dug my fingers into his buttocks. I pressed myself up at him, and he slid into me. This time his moan of pleasure was matched by mine.

There had never been a physical sensation like this. It was overwhelming, blotting out everything else in the universe, narrowing all of time and space to this moment and our two linked bodies. Nothing existed anywhere but our desire and the approaching fulfillment. His mouth and tongue found mine, as they had before, and it was not disgusting, not even just tolerable, but wonderful, part of the need to be close .... Close .... With his every thrust I could feel the moment of release growing closer, closer .... I was rising, tightening, I could not hold back .... My body shuddered uncontrollably, and exploded.

Ordered thought returned slowly. He was resting heavily on me, his breath hot on my neck, relaxed in a way that he had not been before. *"Thee is well?"* I asked him.

"Yes. To have thee at one with me in my need eased me greatly. Is thee ...."

"I am content." My body felt limp, boneless. I could not have moved even if it were necessary for my survival.

"May I rest here?" he asked, a little shyly. *"It is comforting."*

"Stay, then. Thee is welcome." Strange. This was the first time that I had felt no eagerness to rid myself of his weight. His breathing slowed, and after a few minutes I knew that he was asleep.

The air felt cool as my damp skin dried, and I reached cautiously to pull up the covers around us. He was still inside me, and when I moved I could feel an echo of remembered pleasure. I wondered if it would be so again the next time. His need was not yet spent, though he was already past the plak tow; more normal than he had been at the outset ....

Normal. The thought brought me up with a jolt. Was this normal? What I had just experienced was far beyond anything that the healers had led me to expect. They had spoken of his desires, his urgency, they had told me how to help him. They had instructed me in ways to make the pon farr easier for me, but they had not spoken of ... ecstasy. I thought the word with a trace of defiance. I would not mislabel or trivialize what I had felt. I had known, of course, in a general intellectual sense, that mating could be pleasant for the female as well as the male, but I had never applied the knowledge to myself. And evidently the healers had not expected me to experience it in an unbonded mating like this one. Perhaps it was his alien, human, half which made him wish to please me? Would I dare to ask him about it later? My eyes were growing heavy. I looked at him tenderly, and stroked his hair before joining him in sleep.

★

The next day he woke to full awareness. I was still sleeping, so I do not know how it was for him in the first instant. But I had already become accustomed to sleeping in his arms, and waking when he stirred. So when his body tensed, and he rolled away from me with a gasp of shock, I woke and reached for him.

He jerked as my hands touched him. *"Do not ...."* His shields slammed into place, and he sat up, his face averted.

There was a tense silence as I cleared the sleep from my mind and studied him. His body was rigid, hands clasped tightly. I realized what had happened. For the first time in days he was completely cognizant of where he was, what he was doing -- and what he had done. Even without any mental contact between us I could see that he found the knowledge painful. "It is not rational for you to be shamed by actions which you could not control," I said after a moment.

He did not look at me. "I ask forgiveness," he said, his voice little more than a raw whisper.

"I do not grant it." That at least gained his attention. He stared at me. I held his eyes with mine. "I do not grant it, since you have done nothing which requires forgiveness."

"I have used your mind and body like an animal ...."

I controlled an impulse of exasperation. There was a logical response, which I wished him to accept. "There is no question of use, when I am here of my own free will. And your actions were not those of an animal, but the natural impulses of a male in the fever."

He shook his head slowly. "I came to the Masters to learn control, and I have shown my lack of it."

"You have done nothing which is not acceptable in this time and place."

"I have ...." His voice thickened, roughened. I was astonished by the depths of self-loathing in it. "I have ... invaded your mind ... corrupted it ... and you

say that it is ... acceptable!"

"I do not understand." There was something more here than ordinary discomfort at losing bodily control. I thought of my own reactions when I had first come to him. Was he feeling something similar? I reached instinctively to meld with him. He made a motion to draw away, and then permitted the touch with weary resignation.

I had already spent four seasons in Gol, and while I sensed that his mind might have a greater potential than mine, at this moment mine was far stronger. I concentrated at first on calming the vivid rush of shame which poured from his consciousness. Then I sorted through the swirl of memories to find the ones which caused the greatest pain. When I found them, it took all my discipline not to let him see my shock and anger.

I had expected shame at the mindless violence of the plak tow, but that was not the major problem. Instead, it was our pleasure that he was rejecting. He could, though with difficulty, reconcile himself to the satisfaction of his biological need, but he was ashamed of the brief happiness that we had found in each other. Ashamed of the closeness, of the hunger he had made my body feel, of the overwhelming eagerness with which we had come together. All those things in him which I had begun to value, which I wished to know more of, he thought of with disgust, blaming them on his human ancestry. It was this which he had come to Gol to eradicate, and it now seemed to him that he had betrayed both himself and me. He expected me to be sickened by contact with him.

He waited passively for me to break the meld, but I did not. Pity was mixing with my anger, and after a moment of deliberation I let him see the emotions.

He was shocked. *"You should not allow me .... You see what contact with me does to you ...."*

"Stop!" I put all the authority I could muster into the word. *"You insult me."*

"Yes." He agreed, but I knew that he had misunderstood my meaning.

"I am tired of your lack of comprehension. I feel no shame for the happiness ...." He winced at the word and the images. I continued inexorably. *"For the happiness which we shared. It will take time for me to assimilate its meaning, but I value it. When you reject it, you insult me. Is that what you wish?"*

"No! Thee has .... I owe thee my life!" He had unconsciously switched to the more intimate form. He was intensely confused. *"Thee is everything ...."*

Suddenly his mind was flooded with desire, the inevitable urgency of the fever battling with his shame. His hand touched my breast, and he began to pull me against him, only to stop and tear himself away with a cry of pain. *"I will not ...."* was all I received from him before the mind link broke.

"Come. You are in need." I reached out, but he rolled away to the far side of the bed.

"No. I will control this. Do not touch me." He stood quickly, though it was obviously painful in his intensely aroused state. He glanced at me, and then shut his eyes and moved hastily to the firepot, staring into its flames with his jaws clenched.

"You cannot control it," I warned him softly. "It will be worse if you try." I stood behind him, but did not touch him.

"Nevertheless ...." He still would not look at me. "I do not wish to take you, to use you that way again."

"You will soon have no choice. Is it better to take me mindlessly as you did at first, or with pleasure and sharing?"

He shook his head and swallowed convulsively, not answering.

I looked at his back, becoming aware for the first time in days that we were both naked. I wanted to hold him, to insist that it was useless to fight his body's demands, but he would learn that for himself soon enough. He deserved the dignity of solitude for a few moments. I searched the room quietly until I found both of our wrinkled and long-discarded robes. I wrapped mine around me, and put

his next to him. After a few seconds he put it on, his eyes never leaving the meditation flame.

I went back to the bed and seated myself. I too would have appreciated the focussing influence of the firepot, but I could meditate without it. Our attitudes seemed to have become mirror images of each other. The anger and disgust which he felt for himself now was a reflection of what I had felt in the beginning. I wished that he could come to have the same compassion for himself that I had come to have for him.

I moved to a different level of concern. What had happened to me? I had been experiencing a gamut of emotions recently which I had thought long vanquished. It was evident that my emotional capacity had not been eradicated by the disciplines of Gol after all, but simply submerged. My emotional control had not, in fact, been so tested before, I thought wryly. Constant association with no one but the Masters and the other acolytes had made it relatively easy to maintain a disciplined mind.

I examined myself, laying out my feelings with the ruthless honesty that Seron had taught me. This man believed that he had corrupted my mind by bringing me into contact with his Humanity. That was obviously not true. The emotions had lain dormant within me; he had not created them. And, searching my mind, I knew that I did not feel corrupted. I would examine these emotions, learn to deal with them, but I was not ashamed of them. What is, is, I thought. In this time, they were clearly appropriate, even useful.

Honesty is always the first necessity for peace. I continued my meditation until I was calmed. Then I lay down and prepared to sleep, wishing that I could give some of that serenity to the silent, anguished figure staring into the firepot.

★

It was worse than I had expected. I do not know how long his control lasted; I suspect that it was hours beyond what he should have attempted. He took me brutally fast, turning me over, spreading my legs with violent haste and forcing himself into me. I instinctively tried to fight him -- the onslaught had woken me from sleep, and I had had no chance to prepare -- but he was far stronger and more determined than I was.

When I had gathered my wits I used my mind to soothe him, for my own protection as well as his comfort. I assured him again and again that I was there, would be there while he needed me. My anger at his stupidity in trying to wait I shielded carefully. There would be time for that later.

There was no pleasure for me this time, and little for him either. In a way it was even worse than the beginning. In the plak tow he had been unable to control, but he had not been aware of it. Now he was aware, and so the pain and humiliation were far greater.

When he was finished he withdrew hastily and lay on his side with his back to me. He had reestablished his shields as soon as he was able, but I could see that his shoulders were shaking. I was sore; my body had felt no desire for him, but I knew that it would pass. Looking at him, I suddenly realized that I cared little any more for his dignity or my own. It was foolish, I thought fiercely, even illogical (though of my logic I was no longer sure), for him to prefer this to the sharing of pleasure. I knelt and turned him over, forcing him to lie on his back and look at me.

There were tears in his eyes and on his cheeks. I knew that he had wanted to hide them from me. I wiped one away with my finger. I had not seen tears in many years, but I let him see that I was not repelled by them.

"You should not touch me," he whispered.

I shook my head. "You are illogical. Do you truly prefer what you just did to tenderness and unity?" He turned his head, not meeting my eyes. "I certainly

do not!" I said vehemently.

"I did not wish to display emotion." His voice was almost inaudible.

I lay down against him, fitting my head into the hollow of his shoulder, resting an arm and leg across him. "So you chose to restrain yourself until your only option was rape?" It was bluntly put, but I wanted him to confront it.

He flinched in horror at the word. His body tensed, and then relaxed slowly as I continued to hold him. "Yes," he admitted in weary misery. He had seen the bruises he had left on my shoulders and thighs.

"That has made me angry," I observed, dropping my shields and pushing gently against his until they gave way. *"You feared our pleasure. Was violence and anger better?"*

"No. No. I had no wish to hurt thee." He could feel now how it had been for me, and I forced him to compare it to the gentler memories. *"I ask forgiveness."*

"And this time I do grant it." It was only logical to let tenderness gradually overcome the anger in my mind.

"It is good to have thee close to me." He slowly let an answering emotion appear, and his hands began to stroke my back, sliding down to the swell of my rump to pull me nearer to him.

I almost smiled. *"It is good for me as well."* There was soft hair on his chest. I rubbed my cheek against it.

"I will need thee again soon," he warned me, a little embarrassed. *"Having thee against me seems to accelerate ...."* He gave a soft gasp as my hand moved to his groin.

I shifted further to the top of him, to where I could feel his growing hardness against my stomach. *"It does the same for me."* The soreness had faded, and my body was changing, preparing itself to mate. The natural process was extremely efficient, I thought hazily. More effective even than the healer's lubricants and relaxation techniques. Not that it was precisely relaxing ....

One of his hands was tangled in my hair, bringing my mouth gently to his. His tongue touched my lips, asking permission to explore. We both moved a little, adjusting our bodies until his penis was rubbing against my genitals, stroking me into greater readiness. His desire was growing as well, but without the brutal urgency which came from holding back. *"Thee was correct. It is better this way."* His other hand had stayed on my buttocks, guiding our movements against each other.

"Much better."

He sensed when I was ready and entered me, easily but slowly. There was a momentary burning, a reminder of pain, but it vanished as he thrust gently. I could tell that he was being careful not to hurt me. I was still on top of him, and I gratefully touched my lips to his cheeks and forehead and eyes, while pressing back and down against him. There was a curious controlled precision to his touch now, as if, with his acceptance of the logic of passion ....

He had caught that thought, and it amused him. I could hear an undercurrent of laughter in his mind. *"Logic of passion?"*

"Thee is ... oh ...." My body shuddered. *"Trying to learn ... scientifically ... oh ... what pleases me ...."*

"I seem to be succeeding."

I moved faster against him and kissed him hard. He liked that .... He growled softly and his thrusts became deeper, less controlled. My last coherent thought before orgasm was that he had succeeded very well indeed.

★

The next days were a time unlike any other in my life. Looking back, it seemed incredible that I had progressed in so short a time from anger and disgust to compassion, to pleasure, and now to joy. He used the word first, holding me warmly one morning. "Thee is a joy to me," he murmured aloud, his face buried in my hair.

His desire was growing, and I held him close, feeling the response in my own

body, just as before. "As thee is to me," I said boldly, and pulled his mouth to mine again in his Human gesture of intimacy. I was aware of his surprised gratitude in the moment before need drove everything else from his mind.

We remained lightly melded much of the time between matings, and we slowly learned more about each other. I wondered if this was a glimpse of what it was like to be bonded. If so, it was not the oppressive thing I had always imagined. I showed him the conflicts I felt over my work, and I saw some of what had driven him to Gol. There was a constant, insistent pattern of Human faces, Human voices and actions in his memories. He cared about them, cared too much, cared more than he believed he could allow himself to care while still remaining Vulcan. But for now, in this short time removed from ordinary time, he could let himself think of them and of his former life without pain or shame.

★

On our ninth day together the pon farr ended. I sensed it as soon as I woke. The pulsing awareness of his need was gone from the depths of my consciousness, and I was alone in the bed. It felt strange. I, who had scarcely touched another being since childhood, now felt oddly bereft without the warm solidity of his body next to me. I sat up quickly and looked around the room. Surely he would not have left without a farewell .... He was kneeling before the firepot, wearing his robe, meditating. He must have risen very quietly not to have disturbed me.

I walked softly to the bathroom without speaking to him. I was suddenly aware of the stickiness of my body and the strongly sexual scent clinging to it. My hair needed washing badly. And in truth, I did not know quite what we would say to each other now. I knew that I at least still felt no shame or regret, but there was an inevitable awkwardness to be faced.

As I was drying off after my shower, I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I turned and studied my reflection. I looked just the same -- or did I? I seemed to see a new softness to my mouth, a new roundness to my body. Since I had undoubtedly lost weight during the pon farr, the notion was absurd. If there was a difference, it was in my perceptions of myself, not in my appearance. I could still see, very faintly, the marks of his hands on my body. I gave a quick shiver and wrapped myself firmly in my robe, tying it tightly.

I emerged to a tantalizing smell. As soon as it reached my nostrils I was ravenously hungry. He had evidently been using the comline; there was an overflowing tray of food on the low table beside the bed, and two tunics hanging near the door. I eyed them gratefully. It had occurred to me while I was washing that I had no clothes. It had been embarrassing to think of returning to my quarters in my wrinkled robe.

He was pouring tea. He handed me a cup without speaking, and I sat with it on the edge of the bed. After a moment of hesitation he sat near me. There were no chairs, but the condition of the bed was an uncomfortable reminder of our activities. For a few more minutes we avoided the need to talk by making huge inroads into the food. Soup, fruit, flat bread, pickles, noodles, cakes .... It all tasted better than I could remember food tasting before.

At last he pushed the tray aside. I was wiping my fingers, and I looked up to find his eyes on me. "I thank thee," he said quietly.

"One does not thank logic," I replied automatically, though it was hardly an adequate response.

"Then I thank thy compassion. Thee was not bound to me, but thee acted with greater duty than ...." He broke off, and I knew that he was thinking about his former bondmate.

"I did what was needed, by both of us." I had found my voice again. "I can thank thee as well. Thee has taught me much about myself."

He raised a skeptical eyebrow. "I doubt the value ...."

"Do not." There were things I knew I must say to him now, while they were

fresh in my mind, and before our fragile intimacy faded. "You have taught me the value of those feelings which you have come here to purge."

His face tightened. "I am surprised that you, whose discipline is greater than mine, would welcome that."

"I have learned much control at Gol. But the first and most lasting lesson has been that it is useless to deceive myself. If positive emotions exist, is it not logical to study how they may be used?"

"Emotion cannot be positive." He said it with a kind of desperate stubbornness, as if he wanted to convince himself more than me.

"'Thee is a joy to me,'" I quoted softly, and saw the pain in his eyes. It was unfair to use his words against him, but truth is often painful. And whatever path he might take from this room, I did not wish him to set out by lying to himself. "Was that not a positive emotion?"

"I was not myself then." He averted his eyes from the stained and crumpled bedclothes which still bore the imprint of our bodies. I could see the pulse beat in the hollow of his throat as he looked toward the window.

"I think," I said with sudden conviction, "that you were far more yourself then than you are now."

He shook his head, still stubborn. I knew that he was not prepared to accept the truth of my words. I moved nearer to him and placed my fingertips lightly on his face. If he would allow it, I wanted him to see for one last time the image of him that I held in my mind. I did not make the meld deep, but enough to show him the difference between the way he saw himself, and the way I saw him.

He was shaken. *"I am not ...."*

"Yes you are."

As I withdrew from the meld, I let my hands stay on his face, memorizing the clean, strong planes of it. I would put them into stone, I thought suddenly. It would be a challenge, different from anything I had attempted before, to capture all of him, not only the strength and beauty and sharp intelligence, but the pain and confusion as well. Could I do it? I was not sure.

I brushed my fingers over his lips, and his hands came quickly up, grasping my shoulders. For an instant we stared at each other, our faces only centimeters apart. The wave of desire had come so unexpectedly that we were totally unprepared to meet it. It seemed to last forever. Then we both dropped our hands, releasing each other, our faces flushing. That was no longer possible between us. The imperative need was gone, and we were not bonded. Still, I thought, recovering my composure, that we had experienced it at all was ... interesting.

We both stood. A greater physical distance between us seemed wise. I thought again of my work. "I ask permission to do a portrait of you," I said formally.

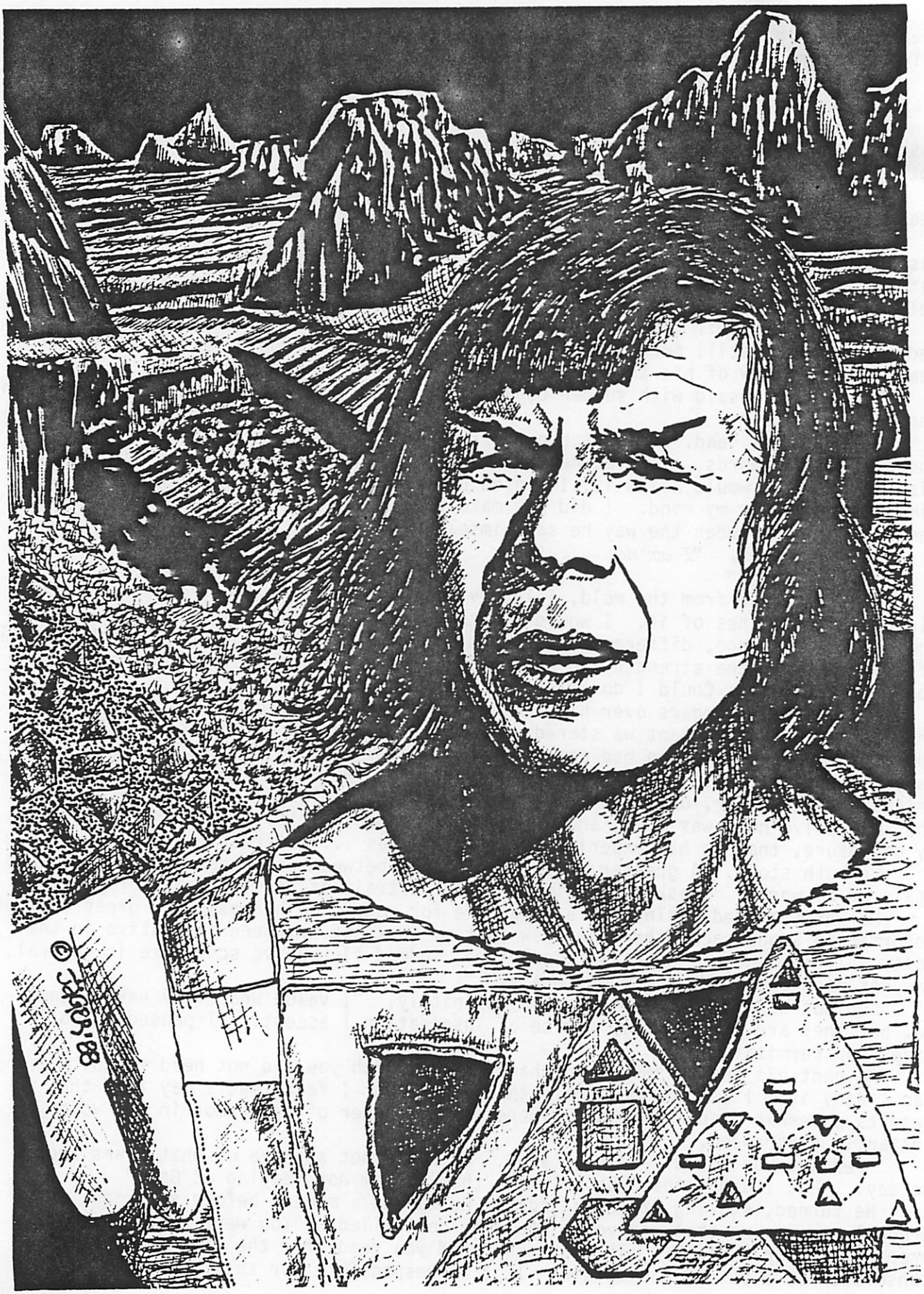
He was startled. "That is a departure for you." We had gained a great deal of information about each other; he knew that my work had not been figurative in the past. "It is unwise." Portrait sculpture, indeed figurative sculpture in general, was not much esteemed. "The Masters ...."

"Do not control my work," I said definitely. "I value what they have taught me, but they are not the only source of inspiration I accept." I paused. "Do I have your permission?"

He bent his head. "Since you have asked, which you did not need to do, how can I deny it? I owe you much more than that. But I fear that I may find the results somewhat disconcerting." There was a flicker of wry humor in his voice, instantly suppressed.

"Perhaps you would." I hesitated. He would not approve of what I was about to say. "But I doubt that you will see them. I am not staying at Gol."

He turned, staring at me in shock. He waited a moment before speaking, probably to assure that his voice would be controlled. "You were about to begin preparation for Kolinahr. The Masters found you ready for the highest level of consciousness a Vulcan can attain. If I am responsible for this ...."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"You are not." I cut him off strongly. "Perhaps you have been a catalyst, but this is my choice, my path. And perhaps ...." This was occurring to me for the first time. "Perhaps that is what the Masters intended ... or wished to discover." I knew that I would never know.

There was wonder in his eyes. "You feel no sense of failure?"

I shook my head. "Even the Masters know that the whole length of their way cannot be travelled by all. I have done what I can do at Gol. It is illogical to attempt what I cannot do -- what I no longer even wish to do. I will take what they have taught me, and I will take what you have taught me, and I will make something better from both of them. I wish ...." I stepped close to him again, wanting to hold him for comfort, but knowing that he would not permit it. "I wish that you could do the same."

He turned away, and said in a low voice. "It is not possible. All my life I have tried ...." He stopped.

"You are staying, then?" I knew the answer, but I wanted him to confront the choice directly.

"Yes. It is my only hope."

He will destroy himself, I thought sadly. Even if he succeeds, he will have destroyed himself. All the warmth and joy and tenderness that he has shown me will be lost, and he will be only a shell of what he is now. But I could not say that to him, and add to his pain. I walked slowly to my clothes and carried them into the bathroom to dress.

★

By the time I came out, he had changed too. He was looking out one of the windows, his hands clasped behind his back. The late afternoon sunlight picked out the highlights in his hair. There could have been worse fates, I thought, than to have been bonded to a man like this one. His childhood mate could not have known him well. In her place, I .... I permitted myself a small sigh. That was another path that I was not meant to follow. He turned to face me.

"I wish thee well," I said, slipping back into the more intimate form for the leavetaking.

"As I do thee."

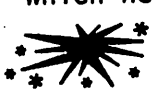
There seemed nothing more to say. I moved toward the door, but before I reached it, I heard a sound behind me, felt a light touch on my arm. Blindly, instinctively, I turned, and we clung together in a final long embrace. I felt his shields drop, and our minds met for a last time, crowded with memories and emotions.

"I will never see thee again." The thought was simultaneous in both of us. In me there was acceptance and regret. In him, the regret was strong, but there was also a faint hint of relief. The time of mating was over, and there would be no place for me, or for these emotions, on the way he had chosen. I let him see that I understood, and rested for a last moment with my head on his shoulder before we parted.

I stopped in the open doorway, and looked back at him. "Live long and prosper, T'Kera," he said, saluting me formally.

I returned the gesture. "Live long and prosper, Spock." I kept my eyes on him until the door closed between us.

I never saw him again, but I have never forgotten him either. The head was much praised in some of the less traditional artistic circles in which I now move. I heard that he did not remain at Gol; that he left abruptly without achieving Kolinahr. I was glad, but I hoped that he had been able to recognize it as a success rather than a failure. He is no longer on Vulcan. Perhaps he has rejoined his Human friends; that may be where he belongs. Wherever he has gone, I can only wish that he has found the peace for which he was searching.



Abekan Encounter

by Cathi Tucker

The door to the transporter room opened and Admiral Kirk entered at a fast trot, smoothing hair and straightening collar in short, jerky motions. Dr. McCoy grinned at him until his eyes crinkled, but Kirk returned only a grim, tight-lipped stare, irritation oozing from his stance.

The woman materializing on the platform was petite, almost to the point of being child-sized, with blonde hair cut in billowy layers from crown to shoulders. Although slender, a faint voluptuousness showed in the way her mauve tunic fit the curves that appeared, to Kirk's seasoned eye, perfectly proportioned to a woman barely five feet tall. Kirk started suddenly, unwilling to break off his slow appraisal once begun. But she was fully materialized now, waiting with toe-tapping impatience for an introduction. McCoy cleared his throat and stepped to her side, offering his arm. "Dr. S'san, may I introduce my commanding officer, Admiral James T. Kirk. Admiral Kirk ... Dr. Katalya S'san, Project Head of Life Science's M.T. Division." Kirk gave a curt nod intended to lower the room temperature by some degrees, but Dr. S'san broke into a wide grin, turning quickly to McCoy.

"Leonard!" she exclaimed, "I'm so pleased your ship will do the first evaluation of our M.T. experimental program!" Arm linked with his, she drew McCoy aside, talking animatedly, but too softly for Kirk to catch more than a few phrases. "... designed to humanize cloning .... Men of the 'Fleet who by choice or chance, have no heir ...."

Kirk was close to stalking from the room, feeling like a high school alumnus who had burst in on the wrong year's reunion. But suddenly McCoy was at his side, pounding him on the back. "Jim, you have to get together with us tonight so I can tell you about how Katalya edged two years off her med studies with a research thesis about the effects of Romulan ale on the sex life of ...."

"Let me guess," Kirk minced in irritated imitation of McCoy's enthusiasm, "Starfleet admirals over the age of fifty who just happen to..."

"Oh Jim," McCoy said disgustedly, "let's not personalize every --"

With that, Kirk turned abruptly to stride from the room.

"Don't mind him," McCoy told Katalya, "he dislikes the concept of the Division and he hates the idea that he could be assigned an M.T. if the program ever gained Starfleet approval. Even though it would be voluntary, Jim Kirk chooses women only at his discretion. Our ship will probably vote a negative, but I'm glad for the chance to visit with you, Katalya. Tell me what Joanna is really up to these days."

Katalya S'san had entered Starfleet's Medical School at the late age of 26, having raised two children past infancy. They were subsequently lost to her by her ex-husband's claim that they were rightfully Abekan by heritage and should be raised there. Her half-Abekan, half-Terran bloodline gave her no strong counter-claim. A new mother was conveniently provided when her ex-husband re-married a full-blooded Abekan princess. Katalya increased her efforts to succeed in her chosen career as the mothering in her nature blossomed fully into a keen intellectual pursuit. She had risen to the top of her graduating class and beyond with clinical studies on genetic engineering. The thesis, which had begun as merely a

private lark, ended up surprising her, her professors, and the medical world with some amazing results. A rare essence used in the distillation process of Romulan Ale produced definite changes in the genetic code of human males when consumed over a period of years. Their off-spring, when a product of mating with a genetically altered female, could be a closely replicated clone of the father, according to her study. Now she needed human volunteers to work through and prove out the thesis on a larger scale.

Life Sciences was only an advisory board to Starfleet. As such, it could offer and recommend, though not enforce, its various programs ranging from geriatric reversals to pediatric enhancements. The new Maternity Division was in a fragile position, needing to gain votes of approval from various branches of Starfleet before it could commence operation. And so, Katalya, as the one and only "leading expert" in the field, was making the rounds of the medical and professional Starfleet community, presenting her program to all who would listen, hoping to gain the acceptance needed to take it off the drawing board.

Katalya had met Leonard McCoy when her roommate in third year -- his daughter, Joanna -- had invited them both to dinner during one of McCoy's rare visits on Earth. Despite their age difference and obvious disparity of medical experience, Katalya and Dr. McCoy had hit it off, professionally at least, immediately. He admired her genius and wry sense of humor, which paralleled his own. Though she was older than Joanna, he reluctantly realized she was still his junior by enough years to make any romantic notions fairly impractical. The friendship, once struck, had endured for the past ten years. Although McCoy could empathize somewhat with Kirk's distaste for Katalya's proposal, he felt loyalty bound to making sure she had a fair hearing on this ship, at least.

After a long, leisurely walk through the ship, both Katalya and McCoy were filled with warm feelings of friendship their years of correspondence had cemented. They parted at the door to the VIP Quarters with a smile and hand clasp. McCoy bent to kiss her cheek, sighing again at the impossibility their ages and career choices made of a relationship. "Jim may come around," he said, "he's a fair man ... it's just that his emotions have taken a beating these last few years."

She smiled absently, thinking of the unshed tears in her own life. "It's okay, Len. Your word could go a long way. I don't need all the ego-busting admirals on my side." They shared a chuckle, then she slipped through the doorway.

The hall seemed darker and McCoy's shoulders drooped a bit as he headed for the turbolift. "Damn!", he punched the door before it opened to whisk him to Sickbay.

"Somehow I'm not surprised to see you here," McCoy said as Kirk looked up from the clipboard he had surreptitiously removed from the desk file.

Kirk banged the file down on the examining table he stood behind. "Damn it, Bones, why did you encourage the first evaluation to be on my ship?"

"Jim, I'm afraid I don't really understand your objection."

With a dark look, Kirk said, "Oh, come on. The first time in a year we have a legit mission instead of training, and you think I should welcome some overzealous, pseudo-scientific snoop probing around, harrassing my male crew ...."

"Jim!" McCoy stopped him, "I'm beginning to worry about you. There was a time this would have amused you at worst ... at best you would have given the program a fair hearing before dismissing it out-of-hand. Ya know," McCoy gave a familiar leer, "we haven't had one of our famous 'locker room' talks in quite a while. How's about I break out a bottle of Saurian brandy and we ...."

"Dr. McCoy," Kirk said sternly, "you are dangerously close to an official reprimand on two counts."

McCoy waited, arms crossed, chin tilting upwards as his eyes narrowed in a professional squint. A minute passed. Then Kirk's face and demeanor crumbled.

"You're right, Bones. You know damn right well I haven't had a woman this past year since David died. I thought I had sorted out all the mid-life garbage. Then we had some dynamic times when there wasn't a chance for me to think about ME. Now, with

a fresh start facing me ... all of us ... professionally, I'm damn queasy about any irregularities on this ship. Dr. Katalya S'san IS an irregularity, no doubt about it. Also very pretty, also with a mission that touches on some sensitive areas. What do you expect from me?"

"Only to listen, cast a vote, then forget it," McCoy said quietly.

"Forget it? When I happen to be in the position of probable guinea pig? No! You just let the Starfleet medicos know I'm officially neutral on the issue and get the woman off this ship before we leave the quadrant." With that, Kirk turned and stalked out the door.

McCoy felt better already. The conversation had confirmed his guess that Jim was irritable in part because of his long abstinence. He also knew Jim was attracted to Katalya. Too bad the girl was so intense about this particular area of the possible uses for her M.D.

"Admiral on the bridge," came the now familiar announcement from Sulu. Things were quiet and controlled, which annoyed Kirk further. Sleep had been hard-won last night and he had considered calling McCoy for a pill or two, but resisted when he remembered the knowing look on the doctor's face before he had left Sickbay. He trusted, however, that Katalya S'san had been sent packing by now and he could settle into whatever routine this mission would bring.

"Admiral," came Spock's voice from the Science Station, "we are entering the Abekan II Sector and I'm reading signs of a Klingon force of six ships following." No sooner were the words out when klaxons sounded and bridge lighting downshifted into the scarlet glow of an automatic Red Alert. Sulu quickly switched the viewer to astern in time to see a half-dozen Klingon ships swooping across open space towards them. Kirk gripped the arms of his chair. "Evasive maneuvers, Sulu. Uhura, open a channel and inquire as to the nature of this unwarranted attack."

As each crew member began their appointed duties, the ship listed suddenly to port, throwing those still standing against the nearest available solid object. Amidst grunts and groans, Kirk shouted, "Return fire!" and was rewarded with,

"One hit, they're falling back, sir."

"Increase to warp seven," Kirk decided aloud, certain that there had been a mistake. Turning with a half-pleading look, he said, "Uhura?"

"No trace of communication attempt, Admiral," she spoke finally, after a moment of squinting and hard listening.

"Warp ten, Sulu," he said, "take us out of here."

As they gained on the Klingon ships and reduced them at last to pinpoints in their wake, Kirk rubbed at his chin and became aware of his surroundings. There were a few injured lying on the floor, and Spock, who had not spoken again since the attack, was busy, fingers flying over computer console, staring into the hooded screen at the science station.

"Admiral," came his deep voice, "I believe we have been 'hoodwinked' by a small force of Abekans who seem able to project an illusion of ships not their own. This ability is as unique as the Romulan's cloaking device once was. I would suggest informing Starfleet and asking for a full investigative team."

A frown crossed Kirk's face. Where had he seen a reference to the planet Abeka recently? Before he could ponder it further, Bones was requesting he come down to Sickbay when he went off duty and Scotty was complaining about a communication blackout immediately before the attack, leaving him unprepared for some of the possible maneuvers used in battle.

Kirk joined Spock at the science station and the two discussed and reviewed tape on the puzzling incident.

"Unless our paths cross theirs again, Spock, I think we're safe in waiting for Starfleet's recommendations," Kirk decided.

When Admiral Kirk walked into Sickbay an hour later, McCoy had his story polished, about how Katalya had been busy giving a final interview to another department head when they had slipped under the wire of transporter range and suddenly come under attack.

"All right, Bones, what's up?"

As McCoy launched into his explanation, he added a few inventive flourishes, but ended with them both knowing the truths that flowed around and between them.

"Just great," Kirk snapped, "I told you this was going to be nothing but trouble."

"Remember, Jim, she's officially licensed as an M.D. and a researcher by Starfleet. She didn't need your permission to be here," McCoy replied.

"Whatever," Kirk said, "she's stuck here now until Starfleet responds on how to handle this Abekan situation."

"Abekan?" McCoy frowned, "Did you know that Katalya was raised on Abeka?"

"That's it!" Kirk exclaimed, snapping his fingers. He had seen the reference in her file earlier in Sickbay. "Gotta go, Bones. I'm going to grant the lady an interview after all."

Katalya was very surprised when Yeoman Cole approached her in the Rec Room to tell her that Admiral Kirk had assigned her an interview time. Even more surprising was that it was for this evening. As she made her way back to her quarters to freshen up, she mused that her appearance was perhaps as important as her presentation. She spent an hour showering, combing, dressing, and at last gave a satisfied look in the mirror. She was professional all the way, but a professional woman. Before turning to pick up her attache, she stuck her tongue out at her reflection and laughed. Still best not to take herself too seriously.

A short way down the corridor she chimed his door briefly. "Come," came the command, and when the door slid open she stepped in decisively. He was seated at a desk in what appeared to be an ante-room to his quarters. "Please sit down," he said, motioning to a chair on his right. She sat, attache in hand, and waited. He busied himself flipping through papers and she surpressed an urge to stick her tongue out again. "Dr. S'san," his voice rumbled pleasantly, as he raised his head and smiled at her, "I've asked you here to find out what you can tell me about Abekan scientific advances in the past few years. Dr. McCoy informs me you were raised there."

She puzzled over his statement, then replied, "I've not visited Abeka in ten years, Admiral. I'm sure I wouldn't know."

"As a native to the planet and a member of the scientific community, how can it be that you know nothing?" he commented.

"That broaches on a personal subject," she replied.

He drew a breath, watching her, considering, then said, "When the ship was under attack earlier, my science officer informed me that Abekan ships were the source. Any comment?"

Her eyes grew wide. "Admiral, I am a <u>medical</u> researcher. While I find it deplorable that the attack had Abeka as its source, I have no knowledge which could help you."

Kirk assessed her words and body language and decided to believe her. "Thank you then, Dr. S'san," he said, rising from his chair.

"But Admiral ... the program evaluation," she began.

"Later," he said, dismissing her summarily.

She walked out of the room, down the corridor and into her own quarters, where she burst into angry tears. *Damn the man!* She had thought that starting her pitch on Leonard's ship would be a good omen. Perhaps the expectation was too high. She couldn't understand what was afoot. Was Jim Kirk playing a game with her? She determined to consult Leonard tomorrow.

The next day came and went without word from McCoy or Kirk. Katalya had received a message early morning that she was confined to quarters as a safety precaution. She paced angrily for the first hour, then settled down with some computer work for the remainder of the day, stopping only once for a mid-day meal. By early evening she was claustrophobic. She called Yeoman Cole, who had earlier indicated a desire to indulge in some personal conversation, and was now off duty.

Linda Cole arrived at her door twenty minutes later with an oddly bulging bundle in her arms. With a grin, from beneath a pile of wildly strung-out computer sheets she produced a bottle of Saurian brandy. "I know what ails you," she laughed, "and this should get a start on fixing it."

Katalya was delighted that this new friend possessed both an apparent sense of humor and a practical bent. Linda was right. She was bored and needed the lift a drink and some small talk could provide.

The two settled at the table and Linda poured the brandy into two glasses Katalya snatched from the bathroom.

"Tell me about your research," Linda started," I've heard rumors, but as an enlisted and a female, I was never briefed."

Katalya started leisurely at the beginning and gave her an outline.

Linda's eyes grew large. "Now I know why Admiral Kirk has it out for you," she breathed. "His reputation as a ladies' man is inviolable."

Katalya, on her third drink, laughed, then caught her breath and said, "Clue me in on his revered reputation. Maybe it'll help me figure out how to deal with him."

After an initial hesitation, Linda launched into a hysterical pantomine of Kirk's loves, lost and won, handed down through the ranks as near folk-lore.

The bottle was empty now, turned on its side near the table's edge. Katalya hiccupped, clapping her hand to her mouth, and her elbow sent it spinning.

"Playing Post Office?" a deep voice asked.

Both women turned in their seats to see Admiral Kirk, hands on hips, standing in the doorway.

Yeoman Cole shot to her feet, then quickly sat again as the room began to spin. "Admiral," she gasped, "I am off-duty, and had no idea you'd ...."

"Dismissed," Kirk cut her off.

She arose and gingerly made her way past him and out the door.

Katalya had grown sullen during the interchange. She resented Kirk's intrusion and she sat back in her seat, eyes downcast, hands folded.

He felt the tension. Looking at her sitting ramrod in the chair, he bristled. "Dr.S'san, I'd like you to know that Saurian brandy is contraband on board this ship. Enlisted crew found possessing it are put on report." He paused and she looked up, green eyes glittering.

"Admiral," she spoke through clenched teeth, rising from the chair, "I'd like YOU to know that I resent being interrogated and then imprisoned ...." She had approached him, finger waggling, until they were nearly face to face.

He softened. "Doctor, you are drunk," he said, firmly taking her by the shoulders. "I think we sould talk tomorrow and I'll explain more fully the reasons for both of those breaches of etiquette." He released her abruptly.

She was giddy with his nearness, his scent, his commanding presence. Slowly, she began to slide down, but he caught her before her knees hit the floor. She swayed, pressing against him and he found his arms around her. For whatever reason, it felt undeniably good to have a woman against him again. He should send her off to bed and return to the gym for his evening workout, but she was so tiny, so vulnerable.

A minute passed. Her breathing slowed and was soft and steady. He felt sensitized to her body's slight pressure against him and began to heat from the core. He caressed her hair, then tilted her chin upwards for his kiss. His lips touched hers softly, brushing back and forth to tease her awake. Her eyes opened slightly and he felt the voltage he had sparked pass down and through her body. She melded herself to him, hips beginning to undulate in a woman's instinctive, eternal movement. He deepened the kiss and her lips parted to accept his hot, smooth tongue. She met its tip with hers and engaged in a delightful oral battle. He won, penetrating her mouth, commanding her passion. He continued to kiss her, feeling his straining rigidity press against her waist through uniform trousers. She was swelling with passion, becoming weak-kneed once more as the dampness crept down her crotch. He suddenly bent, scooping her up beneath shoulders and knees and carried

her to the bed. Sitting her on the edge, he lifted her tunic and undershirt. As it pulled upwards, it turned inside out, trapping her face in a bulge of material. She laughed, using her own hands to free herself, then pulled at his jacket. He laid her back, watching with delight the movements of her breasts. When she was fully reclined, he unbelted his jacket and slid it off, shirt following behind in a heap on the floor. Lightly furred, muscular chest touched silken breasts as he brushed against her, over and over. His hands, then lips, teased the large, dusky nipples to readiness. She squirmed and moaned, tongue darting in and out of his ear.

He felt wild with passion now and roughly tugged her pants down to knee level, then slowly rained kisses down her front until he reached the dark, moist triangle between her eagerly spread thighs. Breathing in the musk of her female fluidity, he almost lost control, but after a pause, continued to arouse her. He knew she was close to orgasm, breath coming in short, strangulated gasps. He drew himself up to tower full length above her as he fumbled with his pants. Once shed, he filled her, pumping rhythmically. She entwined her legs with his, meeting his movements in strong counterpoint.

"Katalya," he whispered simply, on the edge.

She began first, moaning his name in reply, and he joined her in the hot pistoning of their bodies. Faster and harder they moved until the last flare went up and over, slowing their matched pace.

He was drenched with effort, slipping against her soft, yielding body. As the stars faded from behind his eyes, he withdrew reluctantly, slowly, and held her close as he turned onto his side.

"Jim," she whispered his name, strange yet welcome on her tongue, "this has been a beautiful night." He echoed the thought with a rumble of assenting laughter, then stroked her face until she slept. He had meant to return to his quarters, but she felt too sweet and warm pressed to him, so he pulled the blanket up over them both, and slept.

She woke first, finding his head at her breast, her fingers tangled in his thick, curled crown. Her small movements woke him and he looked up, grinning rakishly at her surprised expression.

"I hope you remember last night," he said.

"I do," she replied, "but more feelings and impressions than precise memory."

"Maybe I can refresh it," he murmured, nibbling softly at her neck, hand easing upwards between her thighs.

"Admiral!" she squeaked.

"You called me 'Jim' last night," he chided, working his way to the soft swell of decolletage her breasts afforded as she lay on her side facing him. He put his face between them, squeezing and softly pummeling, as he alternately kissed and licked at the perimeters.

Desire leapt in her again, flames flickering and melting her in secret places.

He knew it as he found her, fingers sliding in the hot, wet flesh. He mounted her quickly, lost in a kiss, then rolled over, pulling her atop him. She got to her knees, golden hair trailing over his face, breasts teasing, touching, rubbing his chest as she took the offensive in thrusting herself onto his erection.

He grasped her hips, rotating her movements to pleasure them both, then within the next few heartbeats, exploded within her, unable to stop the wave of ecstasy she drew from him.

Riding a crest of her own, she came down hard on top of him, grinding her pelvis against his in writhing, moaning delight. A few moments later she returned the grin, whispering, "I remember it ALL now, thanks!"

He was laying back on the pillow, hands beneath head, in a relaxed, sated posture. "Kat," he nicknamed her instantly, "I'm due on the bridge, but I promise you we'll talk later today."

She rose to go into the bathroom and he gave a playful slap to her derierre. She turned and fell on him, tickling, with fingers kneading his ribs. He laughed

outrageously, but easily captured her hands, pinning her on the bed, spread-eagled. "I love it," he whispered close to her ear. With that, he jumped up, scooped up his pile of clothes and disappeared behind the bathroom door. Minutes later the Admiral re-appeared and her heart wrenched at his handsome remoteness. She feigned sleep beneath the blanket. She needed a chance to think. How would this change her mission, her career, her life?

With him gone, the room took on a gloomy atmosphere. She supposed she was still confined and set about showering, mind racing. By mid-afternoon she felt frantic, out of control. Her emotions were turmoiled in a near-adolescent jumble and she intensely disliked the feeling that she had lost her intellectual rudder. If she was going to bed a Starfleet man, it should have been Leonard, she mused. At least he was sensitive with a woman, and she had known from the start that he had desired her.

At that moment the door chimed and she opened it to a haggard Jim Kirk. She was startled, but kept her reserve. He walked in, sat on her bed's edge and looked at her wordlessly.

She considered taking a light tone, but was frightened, not knowing him well enough to gauge his reaction.

"Kat," he started, "I'm short of sleep and long on problems. If nothing else, I need you as an interpreter for the Abekan crisis I mentioned to you earlier."

Eyes wide, she replied, "Certainly. I'll do whatever I can."

He told her in more detail what had transpired and that Abekan ships, cloaked as Klingon, were again approaching. Without a direct line to Starfleet at present, he needed to avoid a confrontation. If she could mediate a hold on the situation for now, Starfleet would save face later, when they would no doubt want to negotiate for the scientific secrets this small, nearly unknown planet had to offer.

She again indicated her acceptance of whatever he proposed and he hurried her to the bridge, where Uhura quickly relinquished her station.

As a Starfleet employee who had gone through basic training in all areas of a general nature, Katalya had a rudimentary, working knowledge of the primary Starship stations. She coded communication to Abekan standards which were as yet unknown beyond this sector due to Abeka's tiny stature and unique language patterns. With a quick return on the channel, the ships acknowledged her and dropped cloak as they moved off to a non-offensive position. The tension on the bridge had been high, and suddenly she was hit with a bad case of after-shock. Trembling hands surrendered the earpiece to a smiling Uhura.

Kirk was locked in conference with the Vulcan Science Officer, so Katalya left the bridge dazedly. Not entirely certain of her orientation, she requested the wrong level and collapsed in tears gratefully when Dr. McCoy faced her at the opening turbolift door. He escorted her into Sickbay, heard a brief amount of her story, then sedated her and angrily called Kirk. "Admiral Kirk," he began, "Dr. S'san is in Sickbay thanks to your abuse of her. She is not trained as a negotiator or communications officer, and I'd appreciate it if you'd remember that in the future."

Kirk, still in heated discussion with Spock, had blanched at the mention of her name. He gave Spock the conn and ran to the turbolift. When he strode through the door to Sickbay, McCoy was waiting, clipboard in hand.

"Jim," he asked tersely, "did you know that Abekans are empathic? Although Katalya is only half-Abekan, the impact of the bridge crew's emotions was devastating to her. Normally, she would be in control, unless some other emotional occurence upset her within the past day or so."

Kirk flushed at the statement, then admitted simply, "I slept with her ... how could I have known? I don't know the innate characteristics of every race in the galaxy, Bones."

McCoy looked a bit sick, but swallowed the reaction and said, "It's okay, Jim. Check in tomorrow around 0800. She'll be awake by then."

Another half-slept night behind him, Kirk arrived in Sickbay at exactly 0800 hours. McCoy took in the touselled appearance and without a word, led him to Katalya's room.

She was sitting up in bed, radiant at his entrance. "I'm sorry I ran," she started.

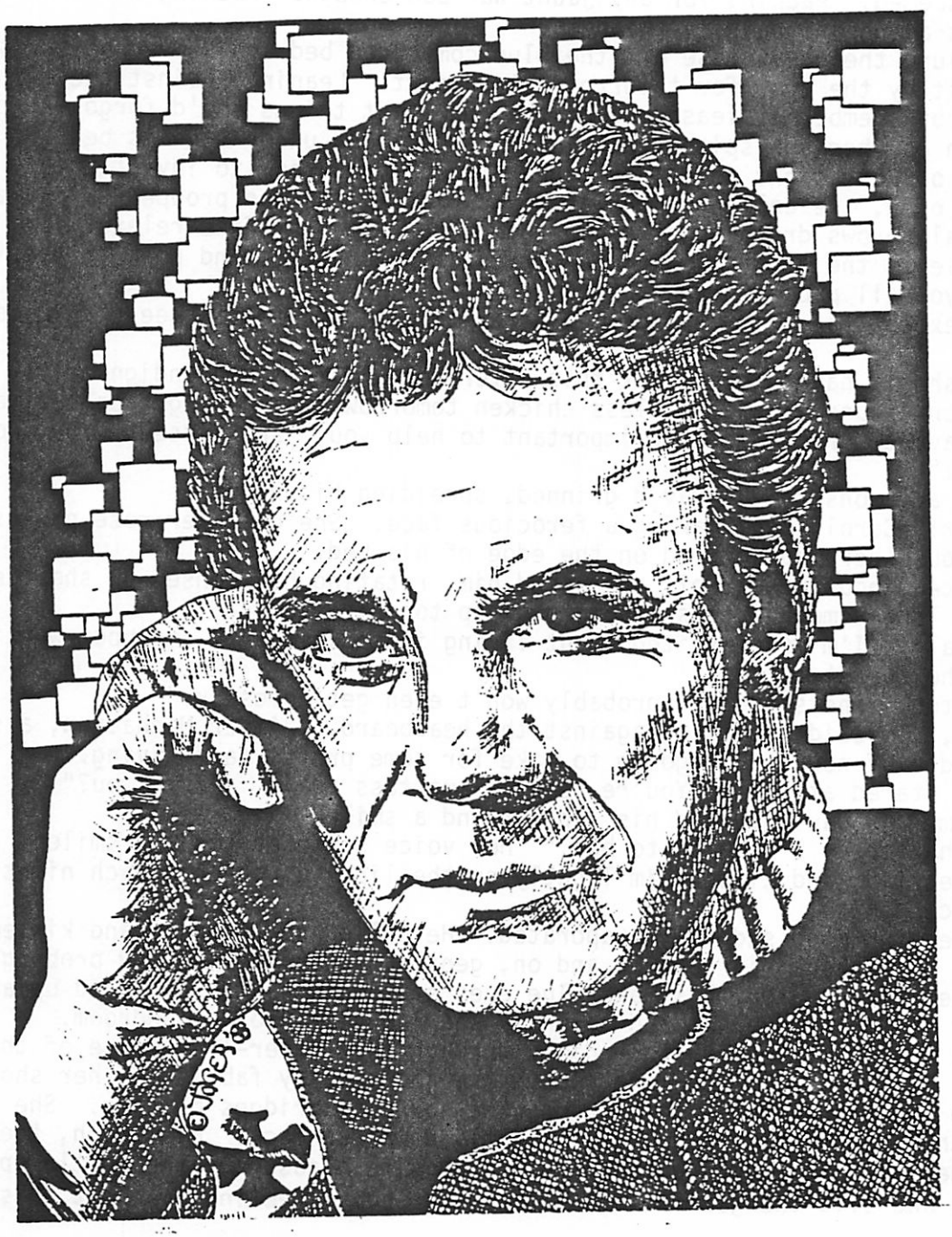
"No," he interrupted, "I'm sorry I demanded so much from you on such short notice. I'll know better ...."

McCoy stuck his head in. "Five minutes," he announced in his country doctor twang.

Kirk relaxed, knowing this meant he could spend whatever time he needed. He bent to kiss her. "Kat," he grinned, "would you consider the six month sabbatical offered to researchers to re-align your program evaluation?"

"I might," she said slowly, "if you promise to fight me every inch of the way if I should ever find a suitable 'M.T.' for you."

After duty today he would go to his quarters and empty a few drawers for her things. He intended to keep her.



FORBIDDEN TO GIVE

by Kimberley Junius

Carol Marcus snapped the suitcase shut with a sigh. It was the last of hundreds, it seemed. Packing for any jaunt was bad enough. Packing for a two-year absence was a special pain in the butt.

She slung the heavy case off the blue comforted bed and shoved it across the room to wait by the door for tomorrow's transport. Leaning against the doorframe, she tried to remember at least one of the important things she'd forgotten to do. She'd given up when she spied the thin slice of light under David's bedroom door. She turned off her light and padded across the living room to investigate.

"It's open," he called in answer to her knock. He was propped up in bed reading, his pale brows drawn together in concentration. His face relaxed into a welcoming smile at the sight of her; he turned off the viewer and pushed it aside.

"Are you all packed?" she asked.

"All except for a few things." "A few things" were in a knee-deep pile on the floor.

"You should have packed that this afternoon!" Carol said indignantly. "You're going to run around like a headless chicken tomorrow trying to get packed, and I'm going to have to drop something important to help you," she fussed. "Why do you do this to me?"

"What are sons for?" David grinned, spreading his hands.

"Grr-r!" Carol said, making a ferocious face. She drew her rose-pink satin wrapper around her and settled on the edge of his bed.

"Excited about the trip?" she asked him, rotating her tensed-up shoulders. It would be a long time before she got to sleep tonight.

"Actually, I'm more excited about living in space than I am about working on Genesis," he admitted.

"Me, too," she said. "I probably won't even get homesick."

"Yeah," he said, relaxing against the headboard. "After Manhattan, a spacelab in the middle of nowhere is going to make for some pretty fast living."

Carol stared at him. "You're being a smartass again, aren't you?"

"Um-hmmm." David tucked his lips around a smile.

"In that case, I'm going to bed." Her voice softened and she smiled. "Night," she said, and kissed him lightly on the lips, as she had each night of his pre-adolescent life.

The teasing mood suddenly evaporated. He pulled her forward and kissed her again. No quick peck, it went on and on, gentle, sweet, delicately probing. He released her. *Your move,* his lake-blue eyes seemed to say. She stood up and offered him her hand. He took it and silently she led him into her bedroom.

Light enough to see by shone dimly through the ladder-like weave of the window curtains. He untied her robe and pushed the cool, shiny fabric off her shoulders. It fell to the floor with a soft thump, the sound of bridges burning. She drew a tiny breath as he ran his warm hands lightly down her back. His touch, the wrongness of their desire, combined to create exquisite pleasure. She deftly opened his nightshirt and slid the garment off his slender body, feeling his heat as she moved

closer.

"You're so beautiful," she whispered, putting her hands on his chest to steady herself. His nipples hardened to urgent points beneath the moist cups of her palms. He covered her hands with his own and kissed her again, kisses she returned eagerly, desperately aroused now. His lips left hers and traveled down her body as he lowered her onto the bed. He paused for the time it took an excited heart to beat three times, then took her breast into his mouth. She drew an agonized breath as she relived the excruciating pain of nursing her son. She remembered the weight of his small body in the crook of her arm, the glint of his spun-gold curls, the orgasmic sensation of her body's response to his hunger as the milk flooded into his mouth, the soft clicking sound his swallowing made. After a while it hadn't hurt anymore, and feeding him became such an intense pleasure she'd often felt guilty afterwards.

"It's so good," she whispered as the man, her son, released her breast and gave her his body, entering her with a precision that took her breath away. She slipped her hands behind him and clutched his shoulders, drawing her legs higher to accommodate him. His size intruded into her consciousness as deeply as it penetrated her body. The intensity of feeling made her dizzy, and she was overwhelmed by his sweetness as they moved together to the delicious rhythm of their hearts. *I have no right to feel this,* she thought, even as she savored his possession of her. The line between love for the son and love for the man blurred, then disappeared. He was her baby and her man, and he'd been forced to withhold himself because to have her this way was taboo. Now he gave her all that he was forbidden to give.

"I'm in love with you," he said sadly, as he tangled his fingers in her pale gold hair. "How can that be?"

She traced the shape of his ear. "It can't be any other way," she told him. "I've always been in love with you."

She found his mouth again, needing to be reassured that its wonder still existed. He took her hand, a gesture of love and trust that pierced her very soul. He was with her, part of her again. She held him tighter as their movements quickened, as he stiffened even more inside her. She was unraveling, coming apart, dying. She cried out; his name first, then simply sounds, a song. And the listening air rang with the symphony of a woman beneath the weight of incomparable love. The symphony that always ended too soon ... the song that ended in tears.

Her voice filled his mind, her body filled his arms, her soul filled his heart. He drowned in his delight in her, so completely absorbed that he didn't notice her weeping. The sobbing shook him as he came slowly back to himself. He jerked his head up, alarmed.

"Oh, don't cry ..." he pleaded in anguish. He brushed at her tears with their still entwined fingers. "... please don't cry."

She struggled to compose. "I'm all right," she assured him, kissing his wet hand. "You never made a woman cry in bed before?"

He shook his head. "I never made love to a woman who really loved me before." He laid his cheek against hers. "I never thought that being in love was important."

"Now you know," she said softly.

He took her face in his hands. "I love you so much."

"I love you forever," she answered.

He smiled. "Forever's a long time."

"I can handle that," she said. He rewarded her with another of his ineffably sweet kisses. The physical manifestation of his love deliciously filled her once more. She murmured his name as she lost herself again in the magic of receiving.

★

He released her hours later, it seemed. She accepted his second exit from her body reluctantly, much more reluctantly than his first. He lay down next to her with a sigh. She hunched her shoulders as he nuzzled her neck, pleasured by the touch of his soft cool lips. She felt sore, sated and exhausted. Too exhausted to deal with

his certain guilt once the glow of their lovemaking faded.

David suddenly pulled away from her, as if she'd spoken out loud. She looked a question his way.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled.

"What?"

Stronger, "I'm sorry ... I shouldn't have ...."

She shifted to her side to face him. "What are you apologizing for, David?" He was silent.

"Don't be sorry about loving me, David," Carol said. "I can take anything but that."

"Is that what it was?" David asked bitterly, staring at the ceiling. "Loving?"

"What would you call it?" she asked. He made a futile gesture, his hand thumping lifelessly to the mattress. "I didn't twist your arm," she said. "And you didn't twist mine. We both wanted this."

"Are you telling me it's all right, then, that we didn't do anything wrong?"

Gently Carol said, "I'm telling you not to beat yourself up about it." She forked the silky blond curls off his forehead with warm, steady fingers. "My mother once told me never to do anything I'd be sorry for; and never, ever, be sorry for anything I do."

"You never talked about your mother before," he observed curiously.

"And I'm not going to talk about her now," she said in a voice that didn't invite discussion.

"Okay." He fell silent. "Mother?"

"Um-hmm."

"I guess I loved you too much for this not to happen," he said slowly, beginning to make peace with himself.

"I guess we both did," she replied.

"But that doesn't mean we have to make it a habit," he amended hastily. Carol smiled.

"Express your love any way you choose, David," she told her son. "As long as you express it." She drew the blue comforter up over her shoulder. "Let's go to sleep."

"I should go back to my room ...."

"You might as well stay." Carol yawned. "It's not like you haven't slept with me before."

"That's right." His voice warmed with the memory. "I slept with you until I was seven. I'd forgotten how nice that was ...." He took her into his arms again. "I love you forever," he said tenderly, burying his nose in her hair.

"That's a long time," Carol said, closing her eyes on relieved tears.

"I can handle that." He tightened his embrace as her tears slipped free and fell on his smooth chest. "Ni-night," he whispered.

BETWEEN THE SHEETS

"Star Trek Fiction for the Mature Reader"
Published by IN CASE OF EMERGENCY PRESS; Vel Jaeger & Kim Knapp, Eds.

What began as a frivolous collection of stories suitable for an adult Star Trek fan fiction reader has shifted a bit over the course of time to include more serious works as well. There are some controversial themes in these stories (none are K/S), but to be more explicit would be to reveal some of the surprises in store for the reader. If you absolutely must know the sordid details, ask Vel. Because Contributing Editor Kim Knapp will be moving some time during the summer, please send advance orders to Vel; address and prices are below.

★ *Approximately 150 pages; high resolution photocopy.*

STORIES:

Right of Passage by Kimberly Junius: Jimmy Kirk is fifteen and still at the family farm in Riverside, Iowa. Playing tag with his childhood friend Rachel, now sixteen, takes on a new dimension, but there's a darker side to her seemingly carefree life.

Fool's Paradise by Larry D. Kirby III: McCoy is only nineteen years old, and still at the University of Georgia when he has an encounter with an older woman that will influence his reactions to Vulcans for quite some time.

A Loaf of Peltrien, A Jug of Krebiah, and Thou Beside Me Beneath the Keva Tree by Karen C. Hunter: T'Siri, a Vulcan/Human hybrid (Spock's sister, in fact, though it has no bearing on this story) decides to explore the Human emotions involved in sexuality—and Kirk is her choice for tour guide.

Winter, Haunt Us Now by Schaezendur: A Human makes the understandable mistake of assuming that a Vulcan surrogate (for unbonded males in Pon Farr) is the equivalent of a Terran hooker. Ostracized by her own culture, she finds the Human visitor most intriguing, and one who forces her to examine her own needs as well as those of Human males. Do they or don't they—wait and see.

The Other Shoe by Leigh Caskey: Spock and Chapel develop an intimate, though strained relationship—at Spock's instigation, and he's not coming down with Pon Farr. Is it really the logical thing to do?

Vulcan Dreams by Kyle Eric Stuart: Spock becomes better acquainted with Isis, Gary Seven's "feline" companion, who is definitely far more than "just a cat."

Cadeau by Janis E. Laine: Spock has a close encounter with a female crewmember who looks Human but is actually a member of a far more sensuous species. Jillia D'arvon is a genetic "sport" indeed.

The Switch by Ann Zewen and Linda Baker: An alien race has caused two senior officers of the Enterprise crew to "switch" sexual drives—much to the delight of some female officers.

S'more Leave by DaraLyn Archer: Adventures on the SHORE LEAVE planet take on a whole new twist when one of the "constructions" decides to stick around permanently. Originally published in ALTERNATIES 2.

Romulan Execution by L.P. Santos: The Romulan Commander from THE ENTERPRISE INCIDENT returns for a final confrontation with Spock, accompanied by her consort Tal and a surprise passenger.

A Flush of Dignity by Carolyn McTarrell: Kirk and Dr. Chapel are the victims of transporter interference, and become the subject of a Vian-style inquiry. Soon it's "Jim" and "Christine" as they take comfort in each other's arms, not to mention other parts of their anatomy.

Reunion by Larry D. Kirby III: McCoy meets his former sister-in-law some twenty years later: she's all grown up now, and still has a crush on him. It's very convenient for McCoy that she's now a widow, and her grown sons are spending the night elsewhere.

Abekan Encounter by Cathi Tucker: Dr. Karalya S'San, a research scientist, arrives aboard the Enterprise, and eventually zeroes in on Admiral Kirk—who has absolutely no objection, but McCoy is a bit distressed.

The Logic of Passion by Jane Land: Spock goes into Pon Farr (you *knew* we couldn't escape without including at least one PF story) while at Gol, and an artist/novitiate is recruited to serve his needs. What they learn about each other (and themselves) is also—well, fascinating.

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